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Honoré de Balzac

Honoré de Balzac

PROVINCIAL LIFE

VOLUME II

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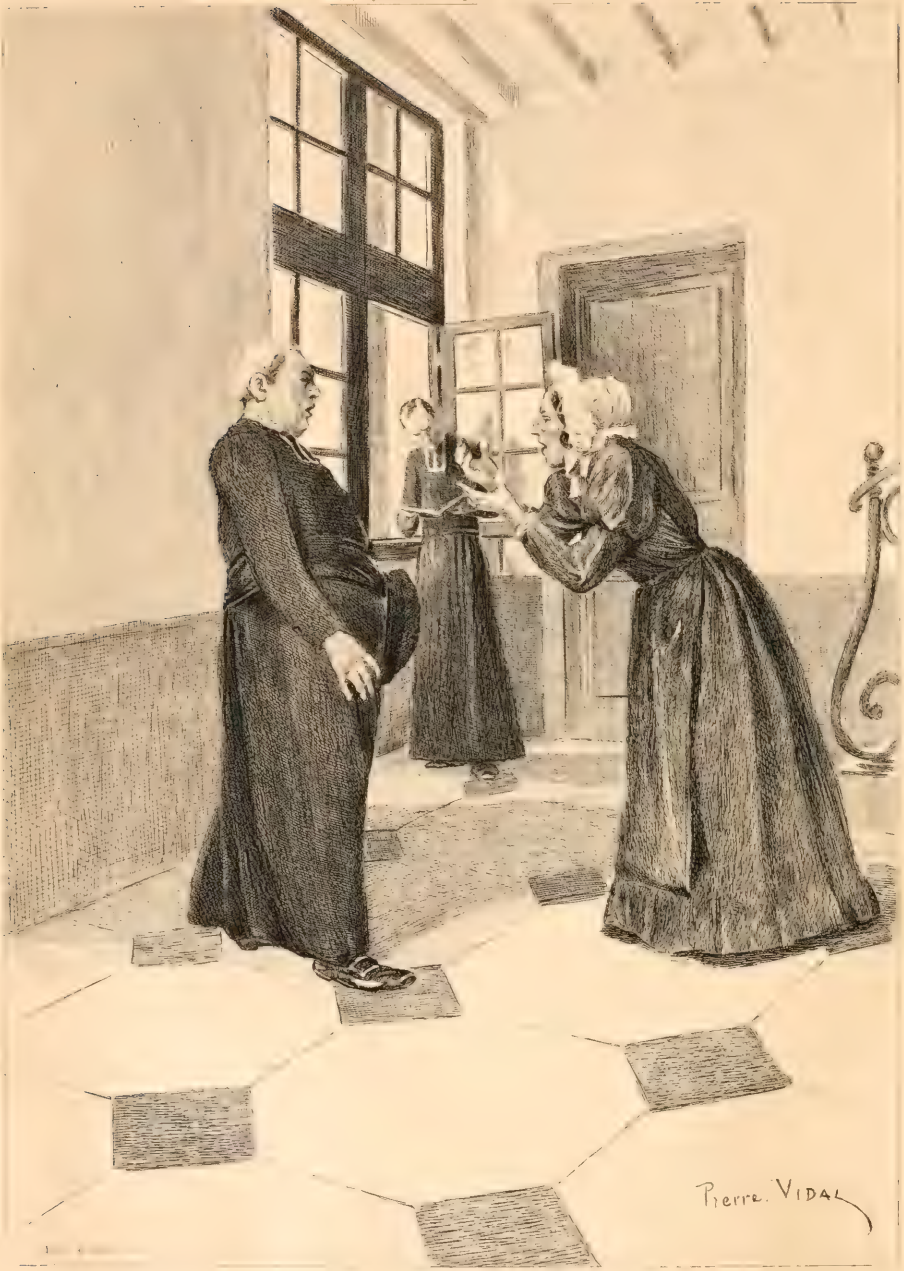
Pierre. VIDAL

BIROTTEAU AT MADEMOISELLE GAMARD'S

Abbé Troubert opened a window in order to be able to read a large folio volume with greater ease. Birotteau stood as if he were rooted to the spot, while Mademoiselle Gamard trumpeted into his ears, in a voice as clear as the notes of a bugle, the following words:

"*Wasn't it agreed—*"

THE NOVELS

OF

HONORÉ DE BALZAC

NOW FOR THE FIRST TIME
COMPLETELY TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH

THE CELIBATES:

PIERRETTE
THE CURÉ DE TOURS
LA RABOUILLEUSE

BY GEORGE B. IVES

WITH TEN ETCHINGS BY EUGÈNE DECISY AND ALFRED
BOILOT, AFTER PAINTINGS BY ORESTE CORTAZZO
AND PIERRE VIDAL

VOLUME I

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THE CELIBATES

FIRST STORY

PIERRETTE

PIERRETTE

*

On a certain day in October, 1827, just at dawn, a young man of about sixteen years of age, whose costume denoted that he was what in modern parlance is innocently called a proletarian, halted upon a small square in the Lower Town of Provins. At that hour he was able to examine unobserved the different houses looking upon the square, which is in shape an oblong rectangle. The mills that border the streams of Provins were already at work. The roar of their machinery, repeated by the echoes of the Upper Town, harmonizing with the sharp air, with the sparkling brightness of the morning, emphasized the profound silence, which made it possible to hear the wheels of a diligence a league away on the highroad. The two longest lines of houses, separated by a row of lindens, are of a simple style of architecture that betrays the peaceful, methodical bourgeois existence. In that spot there is no sign of business. At the time of which we write there were but few of the ornamental *portes cochères* of wealthy people to be seen! if there were any, they rarely turned upon their hinges, except that of Monsieur Martener, a physician, who was obliged to keep a cabriolet and to use it. Some of the house fronts were embellished with climbing vines, others with rose bushes with long stalks that reached to the first floor, where their large bushy flowers, few in number, filled the apartments with perfume.

One end of this square almost touches the main street of the Lower Town. The other end is crossed by a street parallel to the main street, with gardens running back to one of the two streams that water the valley of Provins.

At that end, which is the quietest part of the square, the young workingman recognized the house that had been described to him: a white stone façade with sunken lines between the courses; the windows closed by gray Venetian blinds and provided with slender iron balconies decorated with rosework painted yellow. Above this façade, which comprises the ground floor and the first floor, three attic windows are cut in a slated roof, upon one of the gables of which is a new weathercock. This modern article represents a hunter in the act of shooting a hare.

The house door is reached by a flight of three stone steps. On one side of the door, the end of a leaden pipe discharges dirty water into a small gutter, and indicates that the kitchen is located there; on the other side, two windows carefully closed by gray shutters, with heart-shaped openings to admit a little light, seem to belong to the dining-room. In the space behind the three steps, and also beneath each window, are apertures to admit air into the cellar, closed by small doors of painted sheet-iron pierced with holes of fantastic shape. At this time everything was new. In this restored house, whose still fresh magnificence was in striking contrast to the time-worn exterior of all the others, an observer would at once have divined the paltry ideas and perfect self-satisfaction of the retired shopkeeper. The young man observed all these details with an expression of pleasure mingled with melancholy; his eyes wandered from the kitchen to the attics with a moderation that denoted deliberation. The rosy beams of the sun discovered at one of the attic windows a calico curtain that the others lacked. The young man's face thereupon brightened up amazingly, he stepped back a few steps, leaned against a linden and began to sing, in the drawling tone peculiar to the people of the West, this Breton ditty, published by Bruguière, a composer to whom we owe more than one charming melody. In Bretagne the young villagers sing this ditty to the bride and groom on their wedding day:

"We come to wish joy to you both on your marriage;
To m'sieur your chosen spouse to-day
And to yourself we homage pay.

"They have bound you for life, my lady bride;
Though circlet of gold your tie indeed
Only by death you can be freed.

"No more will you go to our balls and assemblies;
Your duty 'tis at home to stay
While we pursue our former way.

"Do you well understand 'tis your duty to be
To husband faithful, constant, true,
Him dear as self to cherish too?

"Accept, then, this nosegay that my hand doth proffer.
Alas! like these blooms of a day,
Your empty honors fade away."

This national music, as delicious to the ear as that adapted by Chateaubriand to *Ma sœur, te souvient-il encore?*—sung in the heart of a little town of Brie in Champagne,—was certain to arouse imperious memories in the mind of a Breton woman, it depicts so faithfully the manners, the good-fellowship, the scenery of that old and noble province. It has an indefinable touch of melancholy, due to the glimpses it gives of real life, which moves one deeply. Is not this power of awakening a multitude of serious and melancholy thoughts by a familiar tune, often of a lively description, characteristic of the popular ballads which are the superstitions of music, if we may accept the word superstition as signifying all that remains after the destruction of nations and survives their revolutions?

When he finished the first stanza the young mechanic, who did not remove his eyes from the curtain in the attic, saw no signs of life there. While he was singing the second, the calico moved. When he sang the words: "Accept then, this nosegay," a

BRIGAUT EN TOUR

A white hand cautiously opened the window, and the maiden saluted the traveler with a movement of her head, just as he finished giving expression to the melancholy thought contained in these simple lines:

"Alas! like these blooms of a day,
Your empty honors fade away."

The workman at once took from his pocket and showed the girl a golden yellow flower.

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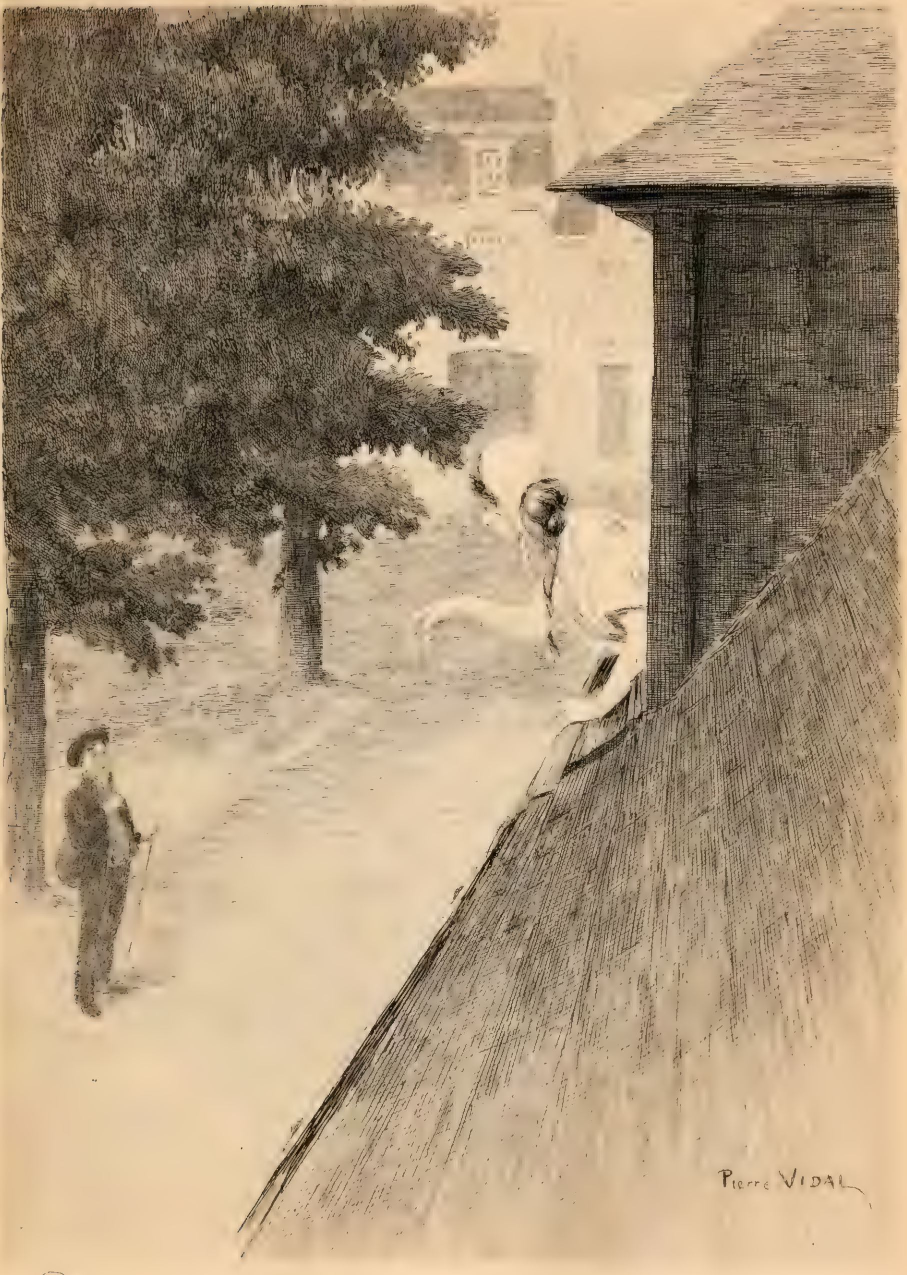
Pierre VIDAL

young woman's face appeared. A white hand cautiously opened the window, and the maiden saluted the traveler with a movement of her head, just as he finished giving expression to the melancholy thought contained in these simple lines:

"Alas! like these blooms of a day,
Your empty honors fade away."

The workman at once took from his pocket and showed the girl a golden yellow flower, very common in Bretagne, which he had found doubtless in the fields of Brie, where it is very rare—the flower of the furze.

"Is it really you, Brigaut?" she said in an undertone.

"Yes, Pierrette, yes. I am at Paris; I am making my tour of France; but I am quite capable of settling down here, as you are here."

At that moment a window sash rattled in the room on the first floor below Pierrette's.

The girl manifested the liveliest terror and said to Brigaut:

"Go! go!"

The young man jumped like a frightened frog and ran down the street—which leads into the Grand' Rue, the main artery of the Lower Town—toward a mill, which causes the street to make a bend; but, despite his agility, his hobnailed shoes, resounding upon the Provins pavement, produced a sound easily distinguished above the din of the mill,—a sound which the person who opened the window could readily hear.

That person was a woman. No man would tear himself away from the enjoyment of his morning nap, to listen to a troubadour in his working clothes; only a maid awakes at a love-song. And so this was a maid, and an old maid. When she had drawn up her blinds, with a gesture like a bat, she looked in all directions and heard, indistinctly, the sound of Brigaut's footsteps as he fled. Is there any more horrible sight than that presented by an ugly old maid at her window in the morning? Of all the grotesque spectacles that entertain travelers as they pass through small villages, is not this the most repulsive? it is too sad, too shocking, to be laughed at. The old maid in question, whose sense of hearing was so acute, made her appearance shorn of all the artifices of every sort which she used to embellish herself; she was without her false curls and her collarette. She wore the horrible little net of black taffeta, in which old maids envelop their cranium, and which showed below her night-cap, the latter being pushed back by her movements in sleep. This disordered condition of the head-gear gave to her head the threatening air which painters attribute to witches. The temples, the ears, and the nape of the neck, being very imperfectly concealed, were as dry as parchment; their harsh wrinkles displayed a reddish tinge far from agreeable to the eye, and made more noticeable by the quasi-white color of the nightgown tied about the neck by twisted cords. This nightgown gaped in spots, disclosing a breast comparable to that of an old peasant woman who cares little for her ugliness. The bony arm produced the effect of a club covered with cloth. As she stood at her window, this lady appeared tall because of the strength and general dimensions of her face, which recalled the extraordinary amplitude of some Swiss faces. The effect of the features was most unpleasant; the principal characteristics of the face were a sharpness of outline, a harshness of coloring, a lack of feeling in the expression, which would have disgusted a physiognomist. The expression that her face wore at this time was commonly modified by a sort of commercial smile, by a bourgeois leer which counterfeited good-humor so well, that the persons with whom she associated might well have taken her for a woman of kindly disposition. She owned the house in common with her brother. The brother was sleeping so quietly in his room that the orchestra of the Opéra would not have awakened him, although that orchestra is famous for its volume of sound! The old maid put her head out of the window, and looked up at the attic with her little eyes, of a cold, faded blue, with short lashes set in rims that were almost always swollen; she tried to see Pierrette; but, realizing the uselessness of the attempt, she drew back into her room with a movement like that of the turtle drawing in its head after he has put it forth from its shell. The blinds were closed and the silence of the square was unbroken, save by the peasants coming in from the country or by other early risers. When there is an old maid in a house, watch-dogs are useless; not the slightest thing happens that she does not see it, comment upon it, and draw all possible inferences from it. Wherefore this occurrence was certain to give birth to grave conjectures, to become the opening scene of one of those obscure dramas—if we may apply the word to this domestic episode—which are enacted in the family circle, and which are none the less terrible because they are kept secret.

Pierrette did not return to bed. To her Brigaut's appearance was an event of vast importance. During the night—the paradise of the unfortunate—she escaped the fatigue and the nagging that she had to endure during the day. Like the hero of some German or Russian ballad, her sleep seemed to her to be a happy life and the day was a horrible dream. After three years she had just had for the first time a pleasant awakening. The memories of her childhood had sung melodiously in her soul. The first stanza she had heard in a dream, the second had made her spring out of bed, at the third she had doubted: the unhappy are of the school of Saint-Thomas. At the fourth, she had gone to the window, barefooted, in her chemise, and had recognized Brigaut, the friend of her childhood. Ah, yes! it was the same square coat with small skirts cut short, and pockets bulging out at the sides; the classic blue cloth coat of Bretagne, the printed cotton waistcoat, the linen shirt fastened by a golden heart, the broad rolling collar, the earrings, the heavy shoes, the breeches of blue unbleached cloth, faded unevenly on account of the varying lengths of the thread,—in a word, all the simple, strong things that make up a poor Breton's costume.

The large white horn buttons of the coat and waistcoat made Pierrette's heart beat fast. At sight of the bunch of furze, her eyes filled with tears, and then a horrible fear crushed in her heart the flowers of her memory that had bloomed for a moment. She reflected that her cousin might have heard her leaving her bed and walking to the window; she divined the old maid's presence and made the gesture of alarm which Brigaut made haste to obey, although he did not understand it. Does not this instinctive submission tell of one of the innocent absolute affections which do exist, from century to century, upon this earth, where they bloom, like the aloes on *Isola Bella*, two or three times in a hundred years? One who had seen Brigaut running away would have admired the most ingenuous heroism of the most ingenuous of sentiments. Jacques Brigaut was worthy of Pierrette Lorrain, who was just completing her fourteenth year: two children! Pierrette could not restrain her tears as she saw him fly with the alarm her gesture had communicated to him. Then she went and sat down upon a rickety chair in front of a little table above which hung a mirror. She rested her elbows on the table, took her head in her hands and sat pensively in that position for an hour, recalling her memories of the Marais, the village of Pen-Hoël, the perilous voyages upon a pond in a boat that little Jacques unfastened from an old willow for her; the faces of her old grandfather and grandmother, her mother's careworn features, and the noble face of Major Brigaut—in a word, her whole untroubled childhood! She was dreaming again: a dream of radiant joys against a dark background. Her lovely ash-colored hair was disheveled beneath a little cap that had become rumpled in her sleep, a little percale cap with ruffles, which she had made herself. Over each temple little curls peeped out from their gray curl papers. Behind her head hung a thick flat braid, partly unbraided. The excessive whiteness of her complexion betrayed one of those horrible diseases of young girls, to which medical science has given the musical name of *chlorosis*, and which deprives the flesh of its natural coloring, takes away the appetite and denotes a serious derangement of the system. Every part of her flesh that was visible was of the same waxen hue. The neck and shoulders had the pallid appearance of faded grass, and accounted for the thinness of the arms folded across her breast. Pierrette's feet seemed to have been softened and wasted by the disease. Her chemise reached only half way down her legs, disclosing over-strained tendons, bluish veins, bloodless flesh. The chilly atmosphere made her lips a lovely violet. The sad smile that lifted the corners of her well-shaped mouth, disclosed a row of small, ivory-white teeth, pretty, transparent teeth, which were a fitting accompaniment to her slender ears, her slightly pointed, but shapely nose, and the contour of her face, which, despite its perfect roundness, was small and delicate. All the animation of this charming face lay in the eyes; the iris, of the color of Spanish tobacco with tiny black spots, shone like burnished gold around the dark, piercing pupil. Pierrette should have been light-hearted, she was sad. Her vanished gayety still existed in the animation of the outer portions of the eye, in the ingenuous charm of the forehead, and in the depressions of the short chin. Her long lashes were outlined like the hairs of a fine brush upon her cheeks, which were wasted by suffering. Her extreme pallor made the outlines and details of her face very pure. The ear was a little masterpiece of sculpture: you would have said it was carved from marble. Pierrette suffered in many ways. So perhaps you would like to know her story; it is this.

Pierrette's mother was a Demoiselle Auffray of Provins, the half-sister of Madame Rogron, mother of the two present owners of the house on the square.

Monsieur Auffray was first married at the age of eighteen, and contracted a second marriage when he was nearly sixty-nine. The issue of his first venture was a daughter, very plain, who was married at sixteen to a Provins innkeeper named Rogron.

By his second wife, goodman Auffray also had one daughter, but this time it was a charming girl. Thus, strangely enough, there was a vast difference in age between Monsieur Auffray's two daughters; the one by his first wife was fifty years old when the other was born. When her aged father presented her with a sister, Madame Rogron had two children of full age.

At eighteen the amorous old man's daughter was married, in accordance with her inclination, to a Breton officer named Lorrain, a captain in the Garde Impériale. Love often makes a man ambitious. The captain, who was in a great hurry to become a colonel, changed into a line regiment. While the major and his wife, content with the allowance made them by Monsieur and Madame Auffray, were shining in Paris or traveling through Germany at the bidding of imperial battles and treaties, old Auffray, who had been a grocer in Provins, died at the age of eighty-eight years, not having had time to make any testamentary disposition of his property. The goodman's affairs were so shrewdly handled by the ex-innkeeper and his wife that they absorbed the greater part of the property, leaving goodman Auffray's widow nothing but her dead husband's house on the little square and a few acres of land. The widow—who was the mother of little Madame Lorrain—was only thirty-eight at her husband's death. Like many widows she conceived the unsavory idea of remarrying. She sold to her step-daughter, old Madame Rogron, the estates and the house that had come to her by virtue of her marriage contract, in order that she might marry a young physician named Néraud, who ran through her fortune. She died of grief and in poverty two years later.

Thus the portion of the Auffray inheritance that should have come to Madame Lorrain disappeared in great part, and was reduced to about eight thousand francs. Major Lorrain died on the field of honor at Montereau, leaving his widow, at twenty-one years, burdened with a little daughter fourteen months old, without other means than the pension to which she was entitled, and the future succession of Monsieur and Madame Lorrain, tradespeople at Pen-Hoël, a Vendean village in the region called the Marais. These Lorrains, the deceased officer's father and mother, and paternal grandfather and grandmother of Pierrette Lorrain, sold builders' lumber, slates, tiles, gutters, etc. Their business, whether because of incapacity or bad luck, did not flourish, and hardly gave them a livelihood. The failure of the celebrated house of Collinet of Nantes, caused by the events of 1814, which brought about a sudden fall in colonial produce, swept away twenty-four thousand francs which they had on deposit there. Naturally their daughter-in-law was made welcome at their home. The major's widow brought a pension of eight hundred francs, an enormous sum at Pen-Hoël. The eight thousand francs which her sister and brother-in-law Rogron sent to her after innumerable formalities, made necessary by their being so far apart, she placed in the hands of the Lorrains, taking a mortgage on a small house at Nantes, owned by them, which was rented for a hundred crowns, and was scarcely worth ten thousand francs.

Madame Lorrain the younger died three years after her mother's second and fatal marriage, in 1819, almost at the same time that her unfortunate mother died. Old Auffray's child by his young wife was small and frail and sickly; the damp air of the Marais was ill-suited to her. Her husband's family, in order to keep her with them, persuaded her that she would find nowhere else in the world a more salubrious and agreeable country than the Marais, the scene of Charette's exploits. She was so carefully nursed and so petted and pampered that her death conferred the greatest honor on the Lorrains. Some people maintain that Brigaut, an old Vendean, one of the men of iron who served under Charette, Mercier, the Marquis de Montauran and the Baron du Guénic, in the wars against the Republic, had much to do with the resignation of Madame Lorrain the younger. If it were so, it certainly would indicate an excessively loving and devoted heart. All Pen-Hoël, however, saw that Brigaut—who was respectfully called *the major*, that being the rank he had held in the Catholic armies, —passed his days and evenings in the living-room, beside the imperial major's widow. Toward the end the curé of Pen-Hoël had ventured to broach the subject to old Madame Lorrain: he had urged her to persuade her daughter-in-law to marry Brigaut, promising to procure the major's appointment as justice of the peace for the district of Pen-Hoël through the influence of Vicomte de Kergarouët. The poor young woman's death made the suggestion of no avail.

Pierrette remained with her grand-parents, who owed her four hundred francs a year for interest, which was naturally expended upon her maintenance. These old people, who grew more and more unfitted for business, had a shrewd, energetic rival, concerning whom they made insulting remarks, without making any attempt to protect themselves. The major, their adviser and friend, died six months after the widow, perhaps from grief, perhaps from his wounds, of which he had received twenty-seven. Like a good business man, the wicked neighbor attempted to ruin his adversaries in order to do away with all rivalry. He arranged a loan to the Lorrains upon their note, foreseeing that they would be unable to pay, and forced them into insolvency in their old age. Pierrette's mortgage was displaced by the presumptive mortgage of her grandmother, who enforced her rights in order to preserve a crust of bread for her husband. The house at Nantes was sold for ninety-five hundred francs, and the expenses amounted to fifteen hundred francs. The remaining eight thousand francs reverted to Madame Lorrain, who invested them in a mortgage so that she could live at Nantes in a sort of *béguinage* called Saint-Jacques, like that of Sainte-Périne at Paris; there the two old people were housed and fed for a moderate stipend.

As it was impossible for them to keep their destitute little grand-daughter with them, the Lorrains bethought themselves of her uncle and aunt Rogron, and they at once wrote to them. The Rogrons of Provins were dead. The letter from the Lorrains to them seemed likely therefore to be wasted. But if there is anything here on earth that can fill the place of Providence, is it not the postal service? The intelligence of the post, incomparably superior to the public intelligence, which by the way does not yield so much revenue, surpasses the intelligence of the cleverest novelists. When the post has in its custody a letter, worth from three to ten sous to it, and does not immediately find him or her to whom it is to be delivered, it displays a pecuniary solicitude the like of which is to be found only among the most undaunted creditors. The post goes and comes, and scours the eighty-six departments. Obstacles kindle the genius of the clerks, who are often men of letters, and who prosecute the search for the unknown with the ardor of the mathematicians of the Bureau of Longitude; they leave no stone unturned in the whole kingdom. At the slightest ray of hope the Paris offices bestir themselves. Often you stare in open-mouthed amazement at the network of marks by which the back and front of a letter are chequered, in glorious attestation of the administrative persistence with which the postal service is managed. If a private individual should undertake what the post office does, he would waste ten thousand francs in traveling and time and money to recover twelve sous. The post office has decidedly more intelligence than it carries.

The letter from the Lorrains, addressed to Monsieur Rogron of Provins, who had been dead a year, was sent by the postal authorities to Monsieur Rogron, his son, haberdasher, Rue Saint-Denis, Paris. Therein the intelligence of the post office was abundantly displayed. An heir-at-law is always more or less perplexed to know if he has gathered all the fruits of an inheritance, if he has not forgotten some claims or rubbish of some sort. The treasury divines everything, even men's characters. A letter addressed to the late Monsieur Rogron of Provins was certain to arouse the curiosity of Rogron junior, at Paris, or of Mademoiselle Rogron, his sister, they being their father's heirs-at-law. And so the treasury got its sixty centimes.

*

The Rogrons, to whom the aged Lorrains, in despair at being obliged to part with their granddaughter, held out their hands imploringly, thus became the arbiters of Pierrette Lorrain's destiny. It is indispensable therefore to say a word as to their antecedents and their characters.

Père Rogron, the Provins innkeeper to whom old Auffray had given his daughter by his first wife, was a person with an inflamed countenance and swollen nose, upon whose cheeks Bacchus had imprinted his red and bulbous vine-branches. Although he was short and stout, with a mighty paunch, fat legs and plump hands, he was endowed with the shrewdness of Swiss innkeepers, whom he resembled. His face vaguely represented a vast vineyard ravaged by hail. He was certainly far from handsome, but his wife resembled him. Never was couple better matched. Rogron loved good cheer and to be waited on by pretty girls. He belonged to the sect of brutal-mannered egotists, who yield to their vicious instincts and do their will in the face of Israel. Covetous, selfish, devoid of delicacy, obliged to provide the means of gratifying his own whims, he consumed all his profits up to the day that his teeth failed him. The avarice remained. In the latter part of his life he sold his inn, appropriated, as we have seen, almost the whole of his father-in-law's inheritance, and retired to the little house on the square, purchased for a mere song from the widow Auffray, Pierrette's grandmother.

Rogron and his wife possessed about two thousand francs a year, from the rent of twenty-seven pieces of land in the neighborhood of Provins, and the interest on the price of their inn, which they sold for twenty thousand francs. Goodman Auffray's house, although in very bad condition, was occupied without alteration by the ex-innkeepers, who shrank from touching it as from the plague: old rats like cracks and ruins. The husband, who conceived a taste for gardening, expended his savings in enlarging the garden; he carried it as far as the river bank, making it an oblong rectangle, enclosed by walls on the sides and ending in a stone embankment, where nature, left to her own devices, displayed all the luxuriance of her aquatic vegetation.

In the early days of their married life these Rogrons had had, at intervals of two years, a daughter and a son: everything degenerates, and their children were frightful to behold. Put out to nurse in the country at a low price, the unfortunate children returned with the horrible village education, having cried long and often for the breast of their nurse, who went regularly to the fields and left them shut up in one of the dark, damp, low rooms, which serve as places of abode for French peasants. In that occupation their features grew coarse and their voices harsh: they flattered their mother's self-esteem but slightly, and she tried to cure them of their bad habits by a rigor which seemed tenderness compared with the father's treatment. They were allowed to run wild in the courtyards and stables and dependencies of the inn, or to roam through the town; they were whipped sometimes; sometimes they were sent to their grandfather Auffray's, who had but little fondness for them. This injustice was one of the reasons that encouraged the Rogrons to lay hands upon a large slice of the *old rascal's* inheritance. Père Rogron put his son to school, and purchased one of his carters as a substitute for him, to save him from the conscription. As soon as his daughter Sylvie was thirteen years old, he sent her to Paris to serve an apprenticeship in a mercantile house. Two years later he pursued the same course with his son, Jérôme-Denis. When his friends, his associates the carriers, or the loungers at the inn, asked him what he intended to do with his children, Père Rogron explained his system with a brevity which had the advantage of frankness over that of the majority of fathers.

"When they are old enough to understand me, I'll give 'em a kick, you know where, and say: 'Be off and make your fortune!' " he would reply as he emptied his glass or wiped his lips on the back of his hand. Then he would look at his interlocutor with a knowing wink:

"Aha! they're no more fools than I," he would add. "My father kicked me three times and I'll kick them only once; he gave me one louis, I'll give them ten; so they'll be better off than I was.

That's the proper way. After me, what remains will remain; the notaries will know how to find it for 'em. It would be a fine thing to put one's self out for one's children!—My children owe me their lives; I've supported them and I don't ask them for anything; we're not quits yet, eh, neighbor? I began by being a wagoner, and that didn't prevent my marrying that old rascal Auffray's daughter."

Sylvie Rogron was sent to serve her apprenticeship on Rue Saint-Denis, with some people who were born in Provins; her board and lodging cost a hundred crowns. At the end of two years she was *at par:* if she earned nothing, her parents would pay nothing more for board and lodging on her account. That is what is called *being at par*, on Rue Saint-Denis. Two years later, her mother having sent her in the meantime a hundred francs for her support, Sylvie had a salary of a hundred crowns. Thus, at the age of nineteen, Sylvie Rogron obtained her freedom. At twenty she was second in authority at the Maison Julliard, silk-yarn merchants, at the *Ver Chinois* on Rue Saint-Denis.

The brother's story was identical with the sister's. Young Jérôme-Denis Rogron entered the employment of the largest haberdashery establishment on Rue Saint-Denis, the Maison Guépin, at the *Trois Quenouilles*. Although Sylvie at twenty-one was forewoman with a salary of a thousand francs, Jérôme-Denis was even better served by circumstances and found himself at eighteen first clerk, with twelve hundred francs, to the Guépins, also of Provins origin. The brother and sister met every Sunday and every holiday; they passed those days in economical diversions, they dined outside of Paris, they went to see Saint-Cloud, Meudon, Belleville, Vincennes. Toward the end of the year 1815, they combined their savings, amassed by the sweat of their brow,—about twenty thousand francs,—and purchased from Madame Guénée the famous establishment of the *Sœur de Famille*, one of the most substantial of the retail haberdashery houses. The sister kept the counting-room, the cash-box and the books. The brother was at the same time proprietor and head clerk, as Sylvie was for some time her own forewoman. In 1821, after they had been five years in business, competition became so brisk and so keen in the haberdashery business that the brother and sister had difficulty in paying expenses and maintaining the excellent reputation of their establishment.

Although Sylvie Rogron was at this time only forty years old, her ugliness, her constant hard work and a certain morose expression due to the arrangement of her features as well as to the anxieties of her life, made her look like a woman of fifty. At thirty-eight Jérôme-Denis Rogron possessed the most idiotic countenance that ever looked upon customers from behind a counter. His retreating forehead, depressed at the temples by fatigue, was marked by three withered furrows. His thin gray hair, cropped close to his head, expressed the indefinable stupidity of cold-blooded animals. The glance of his bluish eyes contained no fire, no sign of thought. His round, flat face aroused no sympathy and did not even bring a smile to the lips of those who make it their business to scrutinize the different types of Parisian: it caused a feeling of sadness. Although he was, like his father, short and fat, his figure, having nothing of the old innkeeper's repulsive corpulence, betrayed a ridiculous debility even in the smallest details. His father's excessively brilliant color was replaced in him by the flabby lividity peculiar to those who pass their lives in stuffy backshops, in the grated boxes called counting-rooms, forever tying and untying bundles, paying or receiving money, nagging clerks or repeating the same old fables to customers. The small allowance of intellect allotted to the brother and sister was entirely absorbed by the details of their business, by debit and credit, by the knowledge of the special laws and customs of Paris. Thread, needles, ribbons, pins, buttons, tailors' furnishings, in a word, the immense quantity of articles which compose a Parisian haberdasher's stock in trade, exhausted the resources of their memories. Letters to write and answer, invoices and inventories, furnished employment for all the faculties they possessed. Outside of their shop they knew absolutely nothing; they did not even know Paris. To them Paris was something exhibited around Rue Saint-Denis. Their narrow characters had their place of business for a field of action. They were admirably well skilled in hounding their clerks and saleswomen and proving them at fault. Their happiness consisted in seeing every hand busily engaged on the counters like a mouse's paw, folding up goods that had been exhibited, or handling the merchandise in some way. When they heard the voices of seven or eight saleswomen and young men glibly repeating the consecrated phrases in which clerks reply to the remarks of purchasers, then the day was fine, it was fair weather! When the blue sky brightened up Paris, when the Parisians were walking about the streets, thinking of no haberdashery except what they wore:

"Bad weather for trade!" the idiotic shopkeeper would say.

The great science that rendered Rogron the object of the apprentices' admiration was his skill in tying, untying, retying and making up a package. Rogron could tie up a package and look at what was going on in the street or watch his shop from one end to the other; he had always seen everything, when, as he handed the package to the customer, he said: "Here it is, madame; wouldn't you like *something else?*"

Except for his sister, the hideous creature would have been ruined. Sylvie had commonsense and a genius for trade. She guided her brother in his purchases of stock, and pitilessly sent him to every corner of France if she saw a chance to make one sou of profit upon an article. The craft which every woman possesses more or less not being needed in the service of her heart, she had carried it into speculation. An establishment to pay for! that thought was the piston-rod that kept the machine at work and imparted to it terrific activity.

Rogron had continued to be simply a head clerk, for he did not understand business methods; his personal interest, the greatest spur of the intellect, had not helped him to make a step. He was often speechless with amazement when his sister bade him sell an article at a loss, foreseeing that it would soon be out of fashion; and he came at last to have a sort of imbecile admiration for Sylvie. He did not reason well or ill; he was simply incapable of reasoning at all; but he had the good sense to subordinate himself to his sister, and he alleged as a reason for his action a consideration entirely distinct from business: "She is older than I am," he said. Perhaps a solitary life, reduced to the mere satisfaction of absolute needs, deprived of money and of pleasure during youth, will explain to physiologists and to thinkers the brutish expression of the face, the weakness of brain and the foolish manners of this haberdasher. His sister had always interfered to prevent his marrying, fearing perhaps that she would lose her influence in the house, and detecting a cause of extravagance and ruin in a woman who would infallibly be younger and in all probability less ugly than she.

Folly has two ways of comporting itself: it keeps silent or it speaks. Dumb folly is endurable, but Rogron's folly was voluble. Retailer that he was, he had formed the habit of scolding his clerks, of explaining to them the details of the business of jobbers in haberdashery, of diverting them with the poor jests that constitute the *bagout* of shops.—This word, which formerly denoted the stereotyped repartee, has been dethroned by the military word *blague*;—Rogron, to whom his little domestic circle were forced to listen, Rogron, well content with himself, had adopted a phraseology of his own. The chatterer fancied himself an orator. The necessity of explaining to customers what they want, of probing their desires, of making them long for what they do not want, loosens the retailer's tongue. The petty tradesman ends by acquiring the faculty of pouring forth phrases, in which the words convey no idea, but which are considered fine. He explains unfamiliar processes to his customer, and in that way obtains a sort of momentary superiority; but when he is once at an end of the thousand and one explanations necessitated by the thousand and one articles he deals in, he becomes, so far as thought is concerned, like a fish on the straw in the sunlight.

Rogron and Sylvie, two machines surreptitiously christened, had, neither in germ nor in action, the sentiments that give the heart a life of its own. Their natures were excessively tough and harsh, hardened by toil, by privations, by the memory of their sufferings during a long and hard apprenticeship. Neither of them complained of any ill-fortune. They were not implacable but intractable in their dealings with embarrassed customers. In their eyes, virtue, honor, loyalty, all the human sentiments, consisted in paying one's bills regularly. Incorrigible busybodies, without heart and sordidly economical, the brother and sister enjoyed an unenviable reputation in business circles on Rue Saint-Denis. Except for their connection with Provins, which they visited thrice each year, at the seasons when they could afford to close their shop for two or three days, they would have lacked clerks and shop-girls. But Père Rogron sent to his children all the unfortunate creatures who were destined for a business life by their parents, and prepared their articles of apprenticeship in Provins, where he boasted vaingloriously of the fortune of his son and daughter. One and all, tempted by the prospect of being assured that his son or his daughter was well instructed and carefully watched, and by the chance that he or she would some day suceed *Rogron fils*, gladly sent the child that was in the way at home, to the establishment kept by the two celibates. But as soon as the apprentice, male or female, at a hundred crowns a year, discovered a pretext for leaving that horrible place, he made his escape with a delight that added to the horrible reputation of the Rogrons. The indefatigable innkeeper always succeeded in discovering fresh victims.

From the time she was fifteen years of age, Sylvie Rogron, having adopted a special grimace for business purposes, had two masks: the amiable expression of the saleswoman, and the natural expression of dried-up old maids. Her acquired expression was marvelous in its mimicry: everything about her smiled; her voice, become soft and wheedling, shed a commercial fascination on the customer. Her real face was the one that was exhibited between the half-opened blinds; it would have put to flight the most determined of the Cossacks of 1815, dearly as they loved French women of all varieties.

When the letter from the Lorrains arrived, the Rogrons were in mourning for their father and had inherited the house that had been almost stolen from Pierrette's grandmother, together with certain outlying estates purchased by the ex-innkeeper and some capital derived from mortgage loans at usurious interest upon small estates purchased by peasants, whom the old sot hoped to oust by foreclosure. Their annual inventory was just completed. The business and goodwill of the *Sœur de Famille* were paid for. The Rogrons also possessed about sixty thousand francs in merchandise in the shop, forty thousand francs in the strong box or the wallet and the value of their establishment. Sitting upon a bench covered with green striped Utrecht velvet, placed in a square recess behind the counter—a similar counter for their forewoman being just opposite—the brother and sister took counsel together as to their future. Every shopkeeper aspires to the bourgeoisie. By turning their business and their stock in trade into cash, they would have about a hundred and fifty thousand francs, exclusive of the paternal inheritance. By investing their ready cash in the public funds, each of them would have three or four thousand francs a year, even if they set aside for the restoration of their father's house the price of their business, which would doubtless be paid in instalments. They could then go and live together at Provins in a house of their own.

Their forewoman was the daughter of a wealthy farmer of Donnemarie, who was burdened with nine children; he had been compelled to find a position for all of them, for his fortune, when divided into nine parts, would give each of them but a trifle. In five years, the farmer had lost seven of his children, so that the forewoman had become such an interesting personage, that Rogron had tried, but to no purpose, to make her his wife. The young woman manifested an aversion for her employer that discouraged all his advances. Moreover Mademoiselle Sylvie did not smile on the project; she opposed her brother's marriage and hoped to make so crafty a maiden as the one in question their successor in business. Rogron's marriage was postponed until after their establishment at Provins.

No passer-by can understand the underlying principle of the cryptogamic existence of some shopkeepers; we look at them and wonder: "On what do they live? why do they live? where do they come from? what becomes of them?" We lose ourselves in vain conjectures, trying to make them out. To discover the grain of poesy that sprouts in their brains and gives animation to their existences, it is necessary to dig into them; but we soon find the bedrock upon which everything rests. The Parisian shopkeeper feeds on a hope, more or less possible of realization, without which he would evidently pine away and die: this one dreams of building or of managing a theatre; that one has his eye on the honors of the mayoralty; another has his country house three leagues from Paris, a so-called park, where he erects statues of colored plaster, where he sets up thread-like fountains, and where he spends absurd sums of money; another dreams of high command in the Garde Nationale. Provins, that terrestrial paradise, inspired in the minds of the two haberdashers the fanaticism that all the pretty towns of France inspire in their natives. Let it be said to the glory of Champagne, that this affection of her people is legitimate. Provins, one of the most charming towns in France, need not fear comparison with Frangistan and the Vale of Cashmere; not only does it contain the poesy of Saadi, the Homer of Persia, but it has pharmaceutical virtues of its own to offer to the science of medicine. The Crusaders brought the roses of Jericho to this charming valley, where it so happens that they take on new qualities, without losing any of their brilliant coloring. Not only is Provins the French Persia; we might also call it Baden, Aix, Bath: it has waters!

This is the landscape, revisited at intervals, which appeared to the brother and sister, from time to time, on the muddy pavements of Rue Saint-Denis. After crossing the grayish plains that lie between

Ferté-Gaucher and Provins, a genuine desert, although not unproductive, a desert of wheat, you come to a hill. Suddenly you see at your feet a town watered by two streams; at the foot of the hill lies a green valley full of charming lines and fleeting shadows. If you come from Paris, you approach Provins endwise, so to speak, along the interminable French highway, which skirts the foot of the hill, cutting off a piece of it, and which is abundantly supplied with blind men and beggars, who follow you with their pitiful, whining voices, when you slacken your pace to gaze at this unexpected bit of picturesque scenery. If you come from Troyes, you approach the town by the flat country. The castle, the old town, and its ancient fortifications are terraced on the hillside. The new town stretches out below. They are called Upper and Lower Provins; the first, an aërial town, with steep streets, beautiful views, surrounded by sunken, ravine-like roads, lined with walnut trees, that make, with their deep ruts, great gashes in the sharp crest of the hill; a neat, silent, solemn town, dominated by the imposing ruins of the old castle; and below, a town of mills, watered by the Voulzie and the Durtain, two Brie rivers, narrow, sluggish and deep; a town of inns and shops and retired bourgeois, furrowed by diligences, calèches and wagons. These two towns, or this town, with its historic souvenirs, its melancholy ruins, its animated valley, its delicious ravines filled with untrimmed hedgerows and with flowers, its river lined with gardens, so maintains its hold upon the hearts of its children, that they do as the Auvergnats, the Savoyards, and Frenchmen generally, do; if they leave Provins in search of fortune, they always come back. The proverb "To die in one's form," intended to apply to hares and faithful folk, seems to be the device of the Provinois.

So it was that the two Rogrons thought only of their dear Provins! While he was selling skeins of thread the brother saw the Upper Town in his mind's eye. As he made up parcels of buttons he gazed upon the lovely valley. As he folded and unfolded silk, he followed the gleaming course of the rivers. With his eyes on his pigeon-holes, he ascended once more the sunken roads whither in the old days he used to fly from his father's wrath, and eat his fill of walnuts and blackberries. The little square of Provins was most frequently in his mind; he thought about improving his house, he dreamed about the new front he proposed to erect, the bedrooms, the salon, the billiard-room, the dining-room and the kitchen garden, which he proposed to convert into an English garden with a bowling-green, grottoes, fountains, statues, etc. The rooms occupied by the brother and sister on the second floor of the tall, yellow six-storied house, with three windows on the front, of which there are so many on Rue Saint-Denis, were without other furniture than what was absolutely necessary; but no one in Paris possessed finer furniture than this same haberdasher. When he walked through the city he would stand in front of the show windows in the attitude of a *teriaki*, gazing at the beautiful things exhibited there, examining the draperies with which he proposed to fill his house. On returning home he would say to his sister:

"I saw in such and such a shop a piece of salon furniture that would just suit us!"

The next day he would purchase another piece, and so it went on. He was tired this month of the furniture purchased the previous month. The budget would not have footed the bills for his architectural schemes: he wanted everything, and always gave the preference to the latest inventions. When he looked at the balconies of newly-built houses, when he studied the timid attempts at exterior ornamentation, it seemed to him that the mouldings, the sculptures, the designs, were not where they belonged.

"Ah!" he would say to himself, "those fine things would look much better at Provins than there!"

When he stood upon his doorstep, leaning against the jamb, with vacant eye, digesting his breakfast, the haberdasher imagined that he saw a fanciful house gilded by the sunlight of his dream; he walked in his garden, he listened to the plashing of his fountain as it fell in glistening pearls upon a round table of freestone. He played on his billiard table and planted flowers. When his sister sat musing, pen in hand, forgetting to scold the clerks, she was fancying herself receiving the bourgeois of

Provins, gazing at her own face, embellished by marvelous caps, in the mirrors of her salon. The brother and sister began to consider the atmosphere of Rue Saint-Denis unhealthy; and the odor of the filth of the market made them long for the perfumes of the roses of Provins. They were afflicted at one and the same time with homesickness and monomania, both of which were emphasized by the necessity of selling their last skeins of thread, their spools of silk and their buttons. The Promised Land of the valley of Provins was the more alluring to these two Israelites because they had really suffered for a long while, as they traveled, gasping for breath, through the sandy deserts of haberdashery.

The letter from the Lorrains arrived in the midst of a season of meditation inspired by this attractive future. The haberdashers hardly knew their cousin Pierrette Lorrain. The matter of the succession had been negotiated by the old innkeeper long before, but since they left home, and the father seldom mentioned his private business affairs. The brother and sister were sent to Paris so early in life that they hardly remembered their aunt Lorrain. Not until after an hour of genealogical discussion were they able to remember anything about their aunt, their grandfather Auffray's daughter by his second wife and half-sister to their mother. They decided that Madame Lorrain's mother must have been Madame Néraud, who died of grief. They concluded therefore that their grandfather's second marriage was a bad thing for them, as it resulted in the division of the Auffray property between the two daughters. They had, moreover, heard some condemnatory remarks from their father, who was always the innkeeper and given to sneering.

The haberdashers discussed the letter of the Lorrains in the light of these memories, most unfavorable to Pierrette's cause. To burden themselves with an orphan, a girl, a cousin, who, in spite of everything, would be their heiress in case neither of them should marry,—surely there was food for discussion there. The question was studied in every aspect. In the first place, they had never seen Pierrette. In the second place, it would be an irksome thing to have a young girl to take care of. Did they not assume certain obligations with her? it would be impossible to send her away if she did not suit them; indeed, would they not be expected to find a husband for her? And if Rogron should find his match among the heiresses of Provins, would it not be better to keep all their fortune for his children? In Sylvie's eyes a fitting match for her brother would be a stupid, ugly, rich girl, who would allow her to lead her. They decided to refuse. Sylvie undertook to write the reply. The pressure of business was such that she delayed writing the letter, which did not seem urgent, and which the old maid forgot altogether as soon as their forewoman consented to make an offer for the stock and good-will of the *Sœur de Famille*.

Sylvie Rogron and her brother returned to Provins four years before the day when Brigaut's arrival added so much zest to Pierrette's life. But the proceedings of those two individuals in the province require an explanation no less than their life at Paris, for Provins was destined to be as fatal to Pierrette, as were her cousins' commercial antecedents.

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When the petty tradesman who has come up from the provinces to Paris returns from Paris to the provinces, he always takes back some ideas with him, only to lose them in the habits of provincial life in which he buries himself, and in which his fancies for renovating everything are swallowed up. To this fact we must attribute the slight and gradual, although progressive changes by which Paris eventually scratches the surface of the departmental towns, and which characterize the transition from the ex-shopkeeper to the rich provincial. This transition constitutes a genuine disease. No retailer can pass with impunity from constant chattering to silence, from his Parisian activity to provincial indolence. When these good people have made a little money, they expend a certain portion of it upon the passion they have long cherished, and bend their last energies to its gratification, in obedience to an impulse that will not be restrained. Those who have had no fixed idea travel, or plunge into the political affairs of the municipality. Some devote themselves to hunting or fishing, or harass their farmers and tenants. Others become money-lenders like Père Rogron, or company promoters like so many who are never heard of again.

You know the fixed idea of the brother and sister; they had to satisfy their royal whim of handling the trowel and constructing their charming house. This fixed idea resulted in embellishing the square of the Lower Town with the façade we have seen Brigaut scrutinizing, with the interior arrangements of the house and its sumptuous furniture. The contractor did not drive a nail without consulting the Rogrons, without making them sign the drawings and estimates, without explaining to them at length and in detail the nature of the object under discussion, where it was made, and its different prices. As to the things that were out of the common course, they had been used in Monsieur Tiphaine's house, or young Madame Julliard's, or Monsieur Garceland's, the mayor. Any suggestion of resemblance to anything owned by one of the rich bourgeois of Provins always ended the battle in the contractor's favor.

"If Monsieur Garceland has that in his house, put it in!" Mademoiselle Rogron would say; "it must be all right, he has good taste."

"Sylvie, he suggests putting ovolos in the cornice in the corridor?"

"Do you call those things ovolos?"

"Yes, mademoiselle."

"Why? what a strange name! I never heard of it."

"But you have seen such things?"

"Yes."

"Do you know Latin?"

"No."

"Well, it means eggs; ovolos are eggs."

"What funny fellows you architects are!" cried Rogron. "That's the reason you don't give away your egg-shells, I suppose!"

"Shall we paint the hall?" the contractor inquired.

"No, indeed!" cried Sylvie, "another five hundred francs!"

"Oh! the salon and stairway are too pretty not to decorate the hall," said the contractor. "Little Madame Lesourd had hers painted last year."

"And now her husband, who's been appointed king's attorney, can't stay in Provins."

"Oh! he'll be president of the court some day," said the contractor.

"Indeed; what will you do with Monsieur Tiphaine in that case?"

"Monsieur Tiphaine has a pretty wife; I'm not at all worried about him: Monsieur Tiphaine will go to Paris."

"Shall we paint the hall?"

"Yes, the Lesourds shall see that we're as good as they are," said Rogron.

The first year of their life in Provins was entirely taken up by these discussions, by the pleasure of watching the mechanics at work, by the amazement and information of all sorts they derived therefrom, and by the attempts they made to become intimate with the leading families of Provins.

In Paris the Rogrons never went into any sort of society, never left their shop; they knew absolutely nobody there, and they were athirst for the pleasures of social life. On their return, the wanderers found first of all Monsieur and Madame Julliard of the *Vers Chinois*, with their children and grandchildren; secondly the Guépin family, or rather the clan Guépin, whose grandson still kept the *Trois Quenouilles;* and lastly, Madame Guénée, who sold them the *Sœur de Famille*, and whose three daughters were married in Provins. Those three great tribes, the Julliards, Guépins and Guénées, spread through the town like dog's-grass over a lawn. The mayor, Monsieur Garceland, was Monsieur Guépin's son-in-law. The curé, Monsieur l'Abbé Péroux, was own brother to Madame Julliard, who was a Péroux. The president of the court, Monsieur Tiphaine, was a brother of Madame Guénée, who always signed her name: *Née Tiphaine.*

The queen of the town was the lovely Madame Tiphaine the younger, the only daughter of Madame Roguin, who was the rich wife of a former notary at Paris, whom no one ever mentioned. Refined, clever and pretty, married in the provinces designedly by her mother, who did not want her with her, and had taken her from boarding school only a few days before her marriage, Mélanie Roguin looked upon herself as an exile in Provins, and bore herself admirably well there. With a handsome dot, she still cherished fond hopes. As to Monsieur Tiphaine, his old father had made such heavy advances to his oldest daughter, Madame Guénée, upon her share of his inheritance, that an estate worth eight thousand francs a year, some five leagues from Provins, was destined to fall to the president's share. Thus the Tiphaines, who had twenty thousand a year when they married, exclusive of the president's salary and house, were likely some day to have twenty thousand more. "They are not badly off," people said.

Madame Tiphaine's great and only object in life was to procure Monsieur Tiphaine's election as deputy. The deputy would become a judge in Paris; and she promised herself that she would speedily bring about his promotion from the inferior tribunals to the royal court. Thus she was very careful to flatter everybody's self-esteem, thus she did her utmost to please; and, what is more to the point, she succeeded. Twice each week she received all the Provins bourgeoisie in her fine house in the Upper Town. Although she was but twenty-two, she had not as yet made a single false step on the slippery ground on which she was walking. She gratified everbody's vanity, flattered everybody's foibles; serious with serious people, a young girl with young girls, essentially motherly with mothers, bright and cheerful with young wives and ready to assist them, gracious to one and all; in short, a very pearl, a treasure, the pride of Provins. She had not as yet said a word on the subject, but all the electors of Provins were simply waiting until their dear president should attain the requisite age before electing him. Every man of them, feeling assured of his talents, looked upon him as his special friend, as his protector. Oh! Monsieur Tiphaine would make his way, he would be Keeper of the Seals, he would look out for the interests of Provins!

By such means had the fortunate Madame Tiphaine attained royal power in the little town of Provins. Madame Guénée, Monsieur Tiphaine's sister, having married her eldest daughter to Monsieur Lesourd, the king's attorney, the second to Monsieur Martener, the physician, and the third to Monsieur Auffray, the notary, had herself taken for her second husband Monsieur Galardon, the tax-collector. Mesdames Lesourd, Martener, Auffray and their mother, Madame Galardon, looked upon Monsieur le Président Tiphaine as the wealthiest and most capable man of the family. The king's attorney, Monsieur Tiphaine's nephew by marriage, had every reason to assist his uncle on his way to Paris, in order to succeed him as president at Provins. Thus these four ladies—Madame Galardon worshiped her brother—formed a little court around Madame Tiphaine, whose advice and opinion they sought in everything. Monsieur Julliard, the elder son of the family of that name, who had married a rich farmer's only daughter, suddenly conceived a fervent passion, unrevealed and unselfish, for the president's wife, that angel descended from the Parisian firmament. The crafty Mélanie, who was quite incapable of embarrassing herself with a Julliard, but quite capable of keeping him in the situation of Amadis and making the most of his folly, advised him to undertake the publication of a newspaper, she to represent his Egeria. And so for two years past, Julliard, urged by his romantic passion, had established a newspaper and a diligence for Provins. The newspaper was called LA RUCHE, *Journal de Provins*, and contained literary, archæological and medical articles, of family manufacture. The local advertisements paid the expenses. The subscribers, some two hundred in number, provided the profit. There appeared in its columns, from time to time, melancholy stanzas, incomprehensible in Brie, and addressed TO HER!!! with these three exclamation points. Thus the younger Julliard household, which rang with the praises of Madame Tiphaine, had united the Clan Julliard with the Clan Guénée. Thereafter, the president's salon had naturally become the first in the town. The few members of the aristocracy who lived in Provins frequented a single salon in the Upper Town, the old Comtesse de Bréautey's.

During the first six months after their transplantation, assisted by their former business relations with the Julliards, the Guépins and the Guénées, and by laying stress upon their relationship to Monsieur Auffray the notary, who was their grandfather's grandnephew, the Rogrons were received, in the first place, by Madame Julliard the elder and Madame Galardon; then, with considerable difficulty, they gained a foothold in lovely Madame Tiphaine's salon. Everyone desired to study the

Rogrons before admitting them. It was hard not to hold out a welcoming hand to tradespeople from Rue Saint-Denis, born at Provins and returning there to spend their income. Nevertheless the end and aim of every social circle will always be to amalgamate people similarly endowed as to fortune, education, manners, knowledge and character. Now, the Guépins, the Guénées and the Julliards occupied a higher social position, could boast of greater bourgeois antiquity than the Rogrons, children of a money-lending innkeeper who had formerly had some reason to reproach himself both as to his private conduct and as to the Auffray succession. Auffray the notary, son-in-law of Madame Galardon, *née* Tiphaine, knew all about it; the business was done in his predecessor's office.

These other ex-tradesmen, who had returned to Provins a dozen years before, had acquired the worldly wisdom and tone and ways of this society, upon which Madame Tiphaine imprinted a certain hall-mark of refinement, a sort of Parisian varnish; everything was homogeneous there: they all understood one another, everyone knew what to expect and how to speak in a way that was agreeable to everybody else. They were acquainted with one another's dispositions, and were accustomed to one another. Once they had been received by Monsieur Garceland, the mayor, the Rogrons flattered themselves that they would very soon be on the best of terms with the best society in the town. Sylvie thereupon learned to play boston. Rogron, who had not wit enough to play at any game, twirled his thumbs and swallowed his words as soon as he had mentioned his house; but his words were like medicine; they seemed to torment him exceedingly; he would rise and act as if he intended to speak, but would take fright and resume his seat with a comical twitching about his lips. Sylvie unconsciously developed her real character at play. Irritable, always complaining when she lost and insolently good-humored when she won, litigious, teasing, she annoyed her opponents and her partners, and became the scourge of the society. Consumed by foolish, outspoken envy, Rogron and his sister essayed to play a prominent part in a town over which ten or twelve families held a close-meshed net,—a town in which the interest and self-esteem of those families formed a sort of floor whereon newcomers must needs look well to themselves lest they jostle against anything or fall.

Assuming that the restoration of their house cost thirty thousand francs, the brother and sister together had about ten thousand a year. They fancied themselves very wealthy, crushed their bourgeois friends with their future magnificence, and exhibited their pettiness, their crass ignorance, their absurd jealousy, in all their glory. On the evening that they were presented to the fair Madame Tiphaine, who had previously observed them at Madame Garceland's, at her sister-in-law Galardon's and at the elder Madame Julliard's, the queen of the town remarked confidentially to young

Juillard, who remained with her and the president a few moments after the others had gone:

"So you've all fallen in love with these Rogrons?"

"Not at all," said the Amadis of Provins; "they bore my mother, they weary my wife; why, when Mademoiselle Sylvie was articled to my father, thirty years ago, he couldn't endure her even then."

"Well, I am strongly inclined," said the pretty hostess, placing her little foot on the bar of the fender, "to teach them that my salon isn't an inn."

Julliard looked up at the ceiling, as if to say: "Great Heaven; what wit! what tact!"

"I propose that my company shall be select, and if I admit these Rogrons it certainly won't be."

"They have no heart or wit or manners," said the president. "If, after you've sold thread twenty years, as my sister did, for instance—"

"My dear, your sister would not be out of place in any salon," said Madame Tiphaine parenthetically.

"If one is silly enough to remain a haberdasher," continued the president, "if one doesn't wash one's hands of the shop, if one is going to mistake the *Comtes de Champagne* for *accounts for wine* furnished, as those Rogrons did to-night, why one had better stay at home."

"They are offensive," said Julliard. "It seems as if there were no house but theirs in Provins. They want to crush us all. After all is said, they have hardly enough to live on."

"If it were only the brother," said Madame

Tiphaine, "one could endure him; he is not too bad. If you should give him a Chinese puzzle he would sit quietly in a corner. It would take him a whole winter to find the solution. But Mademoiselle Sylvie! what a voice she has, like a hyena with a cold in his head! what lobster claws!—Don't mention this, Julliard."

When Julliard had gone, the little woman said to her husband:

"My dear, I have enough natives now whom I am obliged to receive; those two in addition would kill me, and if you agree, we will deprive ourselves of—"

"You're mistress in your own house," said the president; "but we shall make enemies. The Rogrons will throw in their lot with the opposition, which hasn't yet developed any substance in Provins. This Rogron is already hanging around Baron Gouraud and Vinet the advocate.

"Ah!" said Mélanie, with a smile, "then they will be of service to you. Where there are no enemies there's no triumph. A liberal conspiracy, an illegal association, a contest of any sort, would bring you forward."

The president looked at his young wife with a sort of timid admiration.

The next day, at Madame Garceland's, it was whispered from ear to ear that the Rogrons had not made a success at Madame Tiphaine's, whose jest about the inn was greatly enjoyed. Not for a month did Madame Tiphaine return Sylvie's call.

Such insolence is quickly noticed in the provinces. Sylvie had a disagreeable scene with Madame Julliard the elder at Madame Tiphaine's, over a game of boston, àpropos of a splendid *misère*, which she declared that her former mistress wilfully and maliciously caused her to lose. Sylvie loved to play tricks on others, but never realized that she might be paid in the same coin. Madame Tiphaine set the example of making up the tables before the Rogrons arrived, so that Sylvie was obliged to wander from table to table, watching the others, who glanced stealthily at her with a knowing air. At the elder Madame Julliard's they took up whist, a game Sylvie did not know. The old maid realized at last that she was under sentence of outlawry, but did not guess the true reason therefor. She fancied that everybody was jealous of her. Soon the Rogrons were invited nowhere; but they persisted in spending their evenings out. Clever people made fun of them, good-humoredly, mildly, by leading them on to say horribly foolish things about the ovolos in their house and about a certain cellaret that had not its equal in Provins.

Meanwhile the Rogron mansion was completed. Naturally they gave some sumptuous dinners, as well to return the courtesies they had received as to exhibit their magnificence. People came simply from curiosity. The first dinner was given to the leaders of society; Monsieur and Madame Tiphaine, at whose house the Rogrons had not yet taken a single meal; Monsieur and Madame Julliard, father and mother, son and daughter-in-law; Monsieur Lesourd, Monsieur le Curé, Monsieur and Madame Galardon. It was one of the provincial dinner-parties at which you sit at table from five o'clock until nine. Madame Tiphaine introduced at Provins the custom that obtained among *comme il faut* people in Paris, of leaving the salon immediately after the coffee was served. It was her evening at home and she proposed to make her escape; but the Rogrons followed the husband and wife into the street, and when they returned, thunderstruck at their failure to detain them, the other guests made Madame Tiphaine's good taste clear to them by imitating her action with a celerity that was positively cruel in the provinces.

"They won't see our salon lighted!" said Sylvie, "and the light sets it off splendidly."

The Rogrons had intended to arrange a surprise for their guests. No one had been admitted to see the house, which had become quite famous. So all the habitués of Madame Tiphaine's salon impatiently awaited her judgment upon the marvels of the Palais Rogron.

"Well," said little Madame Martener, "you've seen the Louvre; tell us all about it."

"Why everything's like the dinner, not of much account."

"How so?"

"Well, the house door, whose crossbars of gilded bronze we were called upon to admire," said Madame Tiphaine, "admits you to a long hall, which divides the house into two unequal parts, as there is only one window on the street on the right, while there are two on the left. On the garden side, the hall ends at the glass door opening on the steps which lead down to a lawn,—a lawn embellished with a pedestal upon which is the plaster image of Spartacus painted to look like bronze. Behind the kitchen, the builder has constructed a little pantry, under the cage of the stairway, which we were not allowed to ignore. The stairway, which is painted throughout in imitation of yellow-veined black marble, consists of a hollow baluster turning upon itself like those that lead from the ground floor to the private rooms on the entresol in restaurants. This tawdry black walnut affair, so light as to be unsafe, was held up to us, with its copper-trimmed balustrade, as one of the seven latest wonders of the world. The door of the cellar is beneath it. On the other side of the hall, fronting the street, is the dining-room, communicating by folding doors with a salon of the same size, with windows looking on the garden."

"No anteroom, then?" said Madame Auffray.

"The anteroom is undoubtedly that long hall, where you're between two draughts," replied Madame Tiphaine. "We have conceived the eminently national, liberal, constitutional and patriotic idea of using only French woods," she continued. "And so, in the dining-room, the floor is of walnut worked in Hungary point. The sideboards, table and chairs are also of walnut. At the windows are white dimity curtains with red borders fastened back by common red bands to gorgeous holders of dead gold rosework with a reddish cap in the centre. These magnificent curtains slide upon rods terminating in elaborate palm-leaves to which they are fastened by lion's claws of stamped copper at the top of each fold. Above one of the sideboards is a restaurant clock attached to a sort of napkin of gilded bronze, one of the conceptions which seem especially to please the Rogrons. They insisted upon my admiring this invention; I could think of nothing better to say than this: that if a napkin ought ever to be placed around a clock, a dining-room was the proper place for it. There are two great lamps on this sideboard like those that adorn the cashier's desk at famous restaurants. Above the other one is an exceedingly ornate barometer which seems destined to play a prominent part in their life: Rogron looks at it as he would look at his future wife. Between the two windows the worthy who furnished the house has placed a white porcelain stove in a horribly over-decorated recess. There is a brilliant red and gold paper on the walls, just the kind you see in those same restaurants, and undoubtedly selected by Rogron on the spot. The dinner was served on a service of white and gold china, with a light blue dessert service with green flowers; but they opened one of the sideboards to show us another service in pipe-clay for everyday use. Opposite each sideboard is a great chest containing the linen. Everything is clear and new and shiny and full of discordant tones. However, I could put up with the dining-room; it has a character of its own; however ugly it may be, it depicts very well the character of the masters of the house; but there's no way of reconciling one's self to five of those black engravings, against which the Minister of the Interior should propose a prohibitory law; pictures of Poniatowski jumping into the Elster, the Defence of the Barrière de Clichy, Napoléon pointing a cannon with his own hands, and the two Mazeppas, all in gilt frames of a vulgar model suited to engravings of that sort, which are quite capable of making one hate success! Oh! how much better I like Madame Julliard's crayons of fruit, those excellent crayons, done in Louis Fifteenth's day, that harmonize so perfectly with the dear old dining-room, with its gray wainscotings, slightly worm-eaten perhaps, but which certainly are characteristic of the province and correspond with the heavy, family silver plate, the old-fashioned china and our customs. The provinces are the provinces; they are absurd when they try to ape Paris. Perhaps you will say: 'You're a jeweler, Monsieur Josse!' but I prefer Monsieur Tiphaine's father's old salon, with its heavy curtains of green and white *lampas*, its Louis XV. mantelpiece, its twisted piers, its old mirrors with beaded frames and its old-fashioned card tables; my old Sèvres vases in old blue, mounted in antique copper; my clock with impossible flowers, my rococo chandelier, and my tapestry-covered furniture, to all the splendors of their salon."

"What is it like?" said Monsieur Martener, overjoyed at the eulogium that the beautiful Parisian had adroitly bestowed upon the provinces.

"As to the salon, it's a bright red, like Mademoiselle Sylvie's cheeks when she waxes wroth at losing a *misère!*"

"Sylvie-red," said the president, whose *bon mot* remained in the Provins vocabulary.

"Window-curtains?—red! furniture?—red! mantelpiece?—yellow-veined, red marble! candelabra and clock?—red marble, mounted in bronze, of an ordinary heavy pattern; Roman lamp-brackets, supported by branches with Greek foliage. From the top of the clock, you are stared at after the Rogron fashion, with an idiotic leer, by the fat good-natured lion called an ornamental lion, which will injure the reputation of genuine lions for a long time to come. This lion holds under one of his paws a great ball, one of the regular accessories of the ornamental lion; he passes his life holding a great black ball, exactly like a deputy of the Left. Perhaps it's a constitutional myth. The face of the clock is a curious piece of work. The mantel mirror has a frame of applied stucco-work, a tawdry, common affair, although quite new. But the genius of the upholsterer breaks out in the refulgent folds of a red material that flow from a *patera* set in the centre of the chimney-piece—a romantic poem composed expressly for the Rogrons, who go into ecstasies when they show it to you. From the centre of the ceiling hangs a chandelier carefully wrapped in a green glazed winding-sheet, and for a very good reason; it is in the most wretched taste; the bronze, which is of the harshest tone, has for ornaments perfectly detestable fillets in burnished gold. Below, a round marble tea-table, more obtrusively yellow-veined than all the rest, presents a shiny metallic surface whereon are gleaming cups of painted China,—and such painting!—grouped around a glass sugar-bowl of such bold workmanship that our little daughters will stare in open-eyed admiration at the circles of gilded copper that surround it, and the sides cut like a doublet in the Middle Ages, and the tongs to take up the sugar, which no one is ever likely to use. The salon is hung with red flock paper in panels surrounded by copper rods secured at the corners by immense palm-leaves. Each panel is further embellished with a chromo lithograph in a frame overloaded with stucco festoons in imitation of our lovely wood-carvings. The furniture, of elm-root upholstered in cashmere, consists of two sofas, two couches, six armchairs and six small chairs, the classic allowance. The console is adorned with an alabaster vase, of the style called *à la Medicis*, kept under glass, and with the magnificent cellaret of which we have heard so much. We have been informed with sufficient emphasis, *that there isn't its fellow in Provins!* Each window recess contains a card table, and is provided with magnificent red silk curtains with muslin curtains inside. The carpet is an Aubusson. The Rogrons did not fail to lay their hands on the one with gaudy flowers on a red ground, the most vulgar of commonplace designs. The salon doesn't seem to be inhabited; you see no books there or engravings, none of the trifles with which people cover tables," she said, glancing at her own table, laden with the various objects then in fashion, albums and pretty things that had been given her. "There are no flowers or any of those trifles that you change from day to day. It's as cold and stiff as Mademoiselle Sylvie. Buffon is right—style makes the man—and certainly there is a style for salons!"

The fair Madame Tiphaine continued her epigrammatic description. After this specimen everyone can easily imagine for himself the apartments which the sister and brother occupied on the first floor, and which they showed to their guests; but no one can conceive the absurd extravagances into which the clever architect had inveigled the Rogrons: the mouldings over the doors, the inside shutters elaborately carved, the stucco-work in the cornices, the pretty painting, the knobs in gilded copper, the bells, the smoke-consuming devices inside the chimneys, the inventions to avoid dampness, the panels in the stairway painted to represent inlaid work, the superfine glazing and locksmithing; in short, all the trifles that add to the cost of a building and delight the souls of the bourgeois, had been lavishly supplied.

No one would go to the Rogrons' evening parties, and their aspirations came to naught. Pretexts for refusing were not far to seek: all the days in the week were pre-empted by Madame Garceland, Madame Galardon, Mesdames Julliard, Madame Tiphaine, the sub-prefect, etc. To create a social circle of their own, the Rogrons thought it was enough to give dinners; their invitations were accepted by young people fond of a joke, and the professional diners-out who are found in all quarters of the globe; but the serious-minded folk all ceased to associate with them. Terrified by the dead loss of forty thousand francs swallowed up, without profit, in the house, which she called her dear house, Sylvie determined to recover that sum by practising economy. So she speedily gave up dinner-parties which cost thirty to forty francs, without wines, and did not realize her hope of creating a social circle, a feat as difficult of accomplishment in the provinces as in Paris. Sylvie dismissed her cook and hired a country girl to do the hard work. She did her own cooking, *for her amusement.*

*

Fourteen months after their arrival the brother and sister were leading a solitary, unoccupied life. Her banishment from society had engendered in Sylvie's heart a deadly hatred of the Tiphaines, the Julliards, the Auffrays, the Garcelands, of the whole bourgeois society of Provins, in short, which she called the *clique*, and with which her relations became excessively cold. She would have been glad to form a second social set in opposition to the other; but the inferior bourgeoisie was made up entirely of petty tradesmen, free only on Sundays and fête-days, or of men of shady character, like the advocate Vinet and the physician Néraud, of impossible Bonapartists like Colonel Baron Gouraud, with whom Rogron allied himself, very ill-advisedly, after some of the more respectable bourgeois had vainly endeavored to put him on his guard against them. The brother and sister had no choice therefore but to sit by the stove in their dining-room, talking over their former business affairs, recalling the faces of their customers and other things equally agreeable. The second winter was not at an end before they were terribly afflicted with *ennui*. They had the utmost difficulty in finding employment for their time. When they went to bed at night, they would say: "Another day gone!" They would spin out the morning as best they could, remaining in bed, and dressing slowly. Rogron shaved himself every day, examined his face in the mirror, and talked with his sister about the changes he fancied he could detect therein; he had discussions with the servant as to the temperature of his warm water; he went into the garden and looked to see if his flowers had sprouted; he went as far as the bank of the river where he had a summer-house built; he examined the joiner's work in his house; had it sprung? had the walls settled and split a panel anywhere? did the painting keep its color? His fears for a sick fowl, or about a place where the dampness had stained the walls, would cause him to return to the dining-room to talk thereupon with his sister, who made a great show of being busily employed, setting the table and worrying the servant. The barometer was Rogron's most useful possession: he consulted it without cause, he would tap it familiarly as if it were an old friend, and say: "It's wretched weather!" to which his sister would reply: "Pshaw! it's what you must expect at this season." If anyone came to see him, he always boasted of the excellence of the instrument.

The breakfast used up a little time. With what moderation those two creatures did masticate each mouthful! Thus their digestion was perfect and they had not to fear cancer of the stomach. The perusal of *La Ruche* and *Le Constitutionnel* carried them to midday. The subscription to the Paris newspaper was taken by him jointly with the advocate Vinet and Colonel Gouraud. Rogron himself carried the papers to the colonel, who lived in Monsieur Martener's house on the square, and whose long stories pleased him enormously. So that Rogron wondered wherein the colonel could be a dangerous associate. He was foolish enough to speak to the colonel of the decree of ostracism pronounced against him, and to repeat the remarks of the *clique*. God knows what a tongue-lashing the colonel, who was as redoubtable an antagonist with the pistol as with the sword and was afraid of no living being, administered to La Tiphaine and her Julliard and all the ministerialists of the Upper Town, people who were sold to the foreigner and were capable of anything to obtain office and to have the pleasure of reading the names of their favored candidates on the election bulletins, etc.

About two o'clock Rogron went for a little walk. He was much pleased when a shopkeeper, standing on his doorstep, stopped him to say: "How goes it, Père Rogron?" He would chat with him, ask him about the news of the town, listen eagerly to the gossip and tittle-tattle of Provins and pass it on. Sometimes he went up to the Upper Town, and walked through the sunken roads, when the weather was suitable. Sometimes he met old men out for a walk like himself. Such meetings were happy events. There were people at Provins who were out of conceit with Parisian life, modest scholars living with their books. Imagine Rogron's attitude listening to an assistant judge named Desfondrilles, who was more an archæologist than a magistrate, as he said to that learned man, Monsieur Martener senior, pointing to the valley:

"Pray tell me why it is that the loungers of Europe go to Spa rather than to Provins, when the waters of Provins have a superior virtue acknowledged by French medical science, a powerful action worthy of the medical properties of our roses?"

"What can you expect!" the man of learning would reply: "it's one of the caprices of caprice, and as inexplicable as all caprices are. Bordeaux wine was unknown a hundred years ago: Maréchal de Richelieu, one of the greatest figures of the last century, the French Alcibiades, was appointed Governor of Guienne; his lungs were affected, the world knows why! the wine of the country agreed with him, restored him to health. Bordeaux thereupon acquired a hundred millions of revenue, and the marshal extended the boundaries of Bordeaux to Angoulême, to Cahors, in a word, to include a circle with a radius of forty leagues! Who knows where the vineyards of Bordeaux come to an end? And the marshal has no equestrian statue at Bordeaux!"

"Ah! if such a thing as that happens to Provins, in this or any other century," rejoined Monsieur Desfondrilles, "we shall see, I trust, either in the little square in the Lower Town, or at the castle in the Upper Town, a bas-relief in white marble of the head of Monsieur Opoix, the restorer of the mineral waters of Provins!"

"My dear monsieur, perhaps the rehabilitation of Provins is impossible," said old Monsieur Martener. "This town has been in bankruptcy."

At that Rogron opened his eyes to their fullest extent, and cried:

"What?"

"It was once a capital that waged a victorious conflict with Paris in the twelfth century, when the Comtes de Champagne held their court here, as King René held his in Provence," the man of learning replied. "In those days, civilization, pleasure, poetry, refinement, women, all the splendors of society, in a word, were not the exclusive property of Paris. It is as hard for towns as for business houses to rise from their ruins: naught of Provins remains to us save the perfume of our historic glory, our roses, and a sub-prefecture."

"Ah! what would France be if she had retained all her feudal capitals!" said Desfondrilles. "Can the sub-prefects replace the poetic, gallant, warlike race of the Thibaults, who made Provins what Ferrara was in Italy, what Weimar was in Germany, and what Munich would like to be to-day?"

"Provins was once a capital?" cried Rogron.

"Where do you come from, pray?" said Desfondrilles.

The magistrate thereupon tapped his cane upon the ground of the Upper Town, and continued:

"Don't you know that all this part of Provins is built over crypts?"

"Crypts!"

"To be sure; crypts of inconceivable height and extent. They are like the nave of a cathedral, with pillars."

"Monsieur is writing a great archæological work, in which he expects to explain these strange formations," said old Martener, as he saw the judge preparing to mount his hobby.

Rogron returned home overjoyed to think that his house was built in the valley. The exploration of the crypts of Provins employed the celibates five or six days, and furnished them with a subject of conversation for many evenings. In this way Rogron was constantly learning something about old Provins, about the connections between families, together with bits of old political news, which he repeated to his sister. During his walk he would say a hundred times, and often several times to the same person: "Well, what do they say?"—"Well, what is there new?" When he returned to the house he would throw himself on a couch in the salon, like a man overdone with fatigue, but fatigued by his own weight simply. He would kill time until the dinner-hour by going twenty times from the salon to the kitchen, consulting the clock, opening and closing doors. While the brother and sister were in the habit of passing their evenings in society, they did not have to wait for bedtime; but, when they were reduced to their own society, the evening was a desert to be crossed. Sometimes people who were returning home through the square, after passing the evening abroad, heard shrieks in the Rogron house, as if the brother were murdering the sister; they recognized the terrific yawning of a haberdasher in the last extremity. The two machines had nothing to crush between their rusty rollers, and they creaked.

The brother talked of marrying, but in a despairing way. He felt old and worn out; a woman terrified him. Sylvie, who realized the necessity of having a third person in the house, thereupon bethought herself of their poor cousin, concerning whom no one had asked them any questions, for everybody in Provins supposed that little Madame Lorrain and her daughter were both dead. Sylvie Rogron never lost anything; she had been an old maid much too long to misplace anything, no matter what it might be! She pretended that she had just come across the Lorrains' letter, and naturally spoke of Pierrette to her brother, who was almost happy at the thought of having a young girl in the house. Sylvie wrote a half-businesslike, half-affectionate letter to the old Lorrains, attributing her delay in replying to the settling-up of their affairs, their removal to Provins, and establishing themselves there. She seemed desirous to have her cousin with her, giving them to understand that Pierrette would inherit twelve thousand a year some day, if Monsieur Rogron did not marry.

One must have been, like Nebuchadnezzar, something of a wild beast and confined in a cage in the Jardin des Plantes with no other prey than the butcher's meat brought by the attendant, or a retired tradesman with no clerk to worry, to realize the impatience with which the brother and sister awaited the arrival of their cousin Lorrain. Three days after the letter was despatched, the brother and sister were already wondering when their cousin would arrive. Sylvie saw in this pretended benevolence to her poor cousin, a method of inducing Provins society to change its tactics toward her.

She went to Madame Tiphaine,—who had visited her disapprobation upon them, and who wished to create a social caste at Provins as at Geneva,—to announce the approaching arrival of their cousin Pierrette, the daughter of Colonel Lorrain, deploring her misfortunes, and posing as one who was very happy to have a young and lovely heiress to present to society.

"You have been a long while discovering her," said Madame Tiphaine ironically, from her throne on a sofa by the fireplace.

By a few words in an undertone, while the cards were being dealt, Madame Garceland recalled the story of old Auffray's inheritance. The notary explained the innkeeper's iniquitous procedure.

"Where is the poor little girl?" asked Président Tiphaine politely.

"In Bretagne," said Rogron.

"But Bretagne is a large place," observed Monsieur Lesourd, the king's attorney.

"Her grandfather and grandmother Lorrain wrote to us—When was it, my dear?" said Rogron.

Sylvie, who was busily engaged asking Madame

Garceland the price of the material of her dress, did not stop to consider the effect of her reply.

"Before we sold out our business," she said.

"And you answered three days ago, mademoiselle!" cried the notary.

Sylvie turned as red as the hottest coals.

"We wrote to the Saint-Jacques institution," said Rogron.

"There is a sort of hospital for old people, called by that name," said a magistrate, who had held a judicial position at Nantes, "but she can't be there, for they only receive people who are more than sixty years old."

"She is with her grandmother Lorrain," said Rogron.

"She had a little fortune, the eight thousand francs your father—no, I mean your grandfather left her," said the notary, making the error purposely.

"Indeed!" cried Rogron, stupidly, failing to understand the sarcasm.

"So you know nothing of your own cousin's fortune or position?" queried the president.

"If monsieur had known it he wouldn't have left her all this time in a house which is nothing more nor less than an asylum," said the magistrate sternly. "I remember now that I knew of the sale of a house at Nantes belonging to Monsieur and Madame Lorrain, on foreclosure; and Mademoiselle Lorrain lost her claim, for I was the commissioner to carry out the decree of the court."

The notary mentioned Colonel Lorrain, who, if he were alive, would be greatly astonished to learn that his daughter was in an establishment like that of Saint-Jacques. The Rogrons thereupon beat a retreat, saying to each other that society was very unkind. Sylvie realized how little success her news had obtained; she was ruined in everybody's eyes, and she could no longer hope to rub elbows with the first society of Provins. From that day forth the Rogrons made no pretence of concealing their hatred of the great bourgeois families of the town and their adherents. The brother then repeated to the sister all the Liberal gossip Colonel Gouraud and Vinet the advocate had tattled to him concerning the Tiphaines, the Guénées, the Garcelands, the Guépins and the Julliards.

"Say, Sylvie, I don't see why Madame Tiphaine turns her back on the trade of Rue Saint-Denis; the best part of her money was made in it. Madame Roguin, her mother, is own cousin to the Guillaumes of the *Cat and Racket,* who turned over their business to their son-in-law, Joseph Lebas. Her father is the notary Roguin, who failed in 1819 and ruined the house of Birotteau. So Madame Tiphaine's fortune must be stolen goods, for what else is it when a notary's wife takes her stake out of the game, and lets her husband make a fraudulent failure? That's very nice! Ah! I see: she married her daughter at Provins, on account of her connection with Du Tillet the banker. And those people play at being proud; but—Well, that's society!"

On the day when Denis Rogron and his sister Sylvie began to declaim against the *clique*, they were, without knowing it, raised to the position of important personages, and were in a fair way to have a social circle of their own: their salon was destined to become the centre of interests that were in search of a stage. At this point, the ex-haberdasher assumes historical and political proportions; for he gave, still without knowing it, strength and unity to the hitherto scattered elements of the liberal party. This is how it came about. The début of the Rogrons was watched with interest by Colonel Gouraud and the advocate Vinet, who were brought together by their isolation and their opinions. These two men professed patriotism of the same variety for the same reasons: they wanted to become personages. But, although they were disposed to assume the functions of leadership, they lacked soldiers. The liberals of Provins consisted of an old soldier become a keeper of a restaurant; an innkeeper; Monsieur Cournant, a notary and rival of Monsieur Auffray; the physician Néraud, the antagonist of Monsieur Martener; of some few straggling persons, farmers scattered through the arrondissement, and purchasers of national property. The colonel and the lawyer, overjoyed to gain a recruit in the person of an imbecile whose fortune might assist their schemes, who would put his name on their subscription lists, who, under certain circumstances, would bell the cat, and whose house would serve as a rallying-point for the party, availed themselves of the Rogrons' enmity against the aristocrats of the town. The colonel, the lawyer and Rogron had a slight bond in their common subscription to *Le Constitutionnel;* it should not be a difficult task for Colonel Gouraud to make a liberal of the ex-haberdasher, although Rogron was such an ignoramus in politics, that he knew nothing about the exploits of Sergeant Mercier: he took him for a confrère.

Pierrette's approaching arrival hastened the development of the avaricious ideas inspired by the ignorance and folly of the two celibates. When he saw that Sylvie had no chance of gaining a foothold in the Tiphaine set, the colonel had a happy thought. Old soldiers have seen so many horrible things in so many countries, so many nude dead bodies grinning upon so many battle-fields, that no face has the power to terrify them, and Gouraud took aim at the old maid's fortune.

The colonel was a short, stout man, and wore enormous earrings, although his ears were already adorned with huge tufts of hair inside. His thin, grizzled whiskers were of the kind that were called fins in 1799. His round, chubby, red face was a little sunburnt, like the faces of all who escaped after the battle of the Bérésina. His fat, pointed paunch described, on the under side, the right angle characteristic of the former officer of cavalry. Gouraud had commanded the Second Hussars. His gray moustaches concealed an enormous *blagueuse* mouth, if we may employ that military word, which alone will fitly describe the gulf in question: it did not eat, it devoured! A sabre cut had mutilated his nose. His voice was the gainer thereby, as it had become hollow and profoundly nasal, like the voice a Capuchin is supposed to have. His small, fat hands were of the kind that cause a woman to say: "You have the hands of a famous rascal." His legs seemed very slender for his body. That corpulent, active body contained an acute mind, a most complete experience of life, concealed beneath the careless exterior of a soldier, and absolute contempt for social conventions. Colonel Gouraud had the cross of the officer of the Legion of Honor, and a retiring pension of twenty-four hundred francs, making in all a thousand crowns as his yearly allowance.

The advocate, a long, lank individual, had no talent except his liberal opinions, and no income save the inconsiderable revenues of his office. At Provins solicitors plead their own causes. Moreover, because of his political opinions, the court looked with little favor on Master Vinet. So that the most liberal farmers, when they had lawsuits on their hands, retained a solicitor who had the confidence of the court, in preference to Vinet the advocate. This man had, it was said, seduced a wealthy girl, in the neighborhood of Coulommiers, and compelled her parents to give her to him. His wife belonged to the Chargebœufs, an ancient noble family of Brie, whose name was derived from the exploit of an esquire during Saint-Louis's expedition to Egypt. She had incurred the displeasure of her father and mother, who took measures, with Vinet's knowledge, to leave their whole fortune to their older son, doubtless with the understanding that a portion was to be paid over to his sister's children. Thus the advocate's first ambitious flight proved abortive. Being soon pursued by poverty and ashamed of his inability to provide his wife with the means of making a becoming appearance, the advocate made fruitless efforts to enter the public service; but the wealthy branch of the Chargebœuf family refused to lend him its influence. Like good, moral citizens, those royalists disapproved of forced marriages; moreover, their alleged kinsman was named Vinet; how could they patronize a plebeian? The advocate was shown out of door, therefore, by one branch after another when he undertook to make use of his wife with her relatives. Madame Vinet was unable to interest any Chargebœuf in her behalf, except a poor widow, burdened with a child, with whom she lived at Troyes. We shall see that Vinet did not forget the welcome accorded by that Chargebœuf to his wife.

Repulsed by the whole world, overflowing with hatred for his wife's family, for the government which refused him an office, for Provins society which would not receive him, Vinet accepted his poverty. His gall increased in bitterness and gave him energy to continue the struggle. He became a liberal, shrewdly divining that his fortune depended on the triumph of the opposition, and vegetated in a wretched little house in the Upper Town, which his wife rarely left. This young girl, who deserved a better fate, was absolutely alone in the house except for a child. Some people accept poverty nobly and endure it cheerfully; but Vinet, consumed by ambition, feeling that he had behaved badly to a girl he had seduced, concealed a smouldering rage in his heart: his conscience expanded and admitted every possible means of success. His youthful face changed for the worse. People were sometimes frightened in the courtroom, when they saw the viperish expression and his flat head, the slit that served him for a mouth, and his eyes gleaming through his spectacles; when they heard his shrill, persistent voice that set one's nerves on edge. His muddy complexion, a combination of unhealthy tints, yellow and green in spots, betrayed his defeated ambition, his constant disappointments and his hidden poverty. He knew how to talk and to split hairs; he was never at a loss for metaphors or for sharp retorts; he was well-informed and shrewd. Accustomed as he was to conceive all sorts of schemes in his desire to succeed, he might become a clever politician. A man who recoils at nothing, so long as it is within the letter of the law, is very strong: that was the source of Vinet's strength.

This future gladiator of parliamentary debate, one of those who were destined to proclaim the accession of the House of Orléans, had a lamentable influence upon Pierrette's fate. For the moment he was anxious to procure a weapon for his own use by founding a newspaper at Provins. Having studied the celibates at a distance, with the colonel's aid, the advocate came to the conclusion that he could rely upon Rogron. This time he reckoned with his host, and his poverty-stricken days were destined to come to an end, after seven wretched years during which he had known more than one day without bread. When Gouraud informed Vinet, on the little square, that the Rogrons had broken with the bourgeois and ministerialist aristocracy of the Upper Town, the advocate gave him a significant nudge.

"One woman or another, beautiful or ugly, it's all the same to you," he said; "you ought to marry Mademoiselle Rogron, and then we could start something here—"

"I have thought of it, but they have sent for poor Colonel Lorrain's daughter, their heir," said the colonel.

"You can make them dispose of their fortune by will. Ah! you would have a very handsome establishment."

"But there's the little one; oh! well, we'll see about it," said the colonel, with a sly and profoundly rascally expression that showed a man of Vinet's stamp how small a matter a girl was in that warrior's eyes.

*

After her grandparents entered the institution where they were ending their days in misery, Pierrette, who was young and proud, suffered such torments at the thought of living on charity, that she was overjoyed to learn of her rich kindred. When he learned of her intended departure, Brigaut, the major's son, her playfellow in childhood, who had become a carpenter's apprentice at Nantes, came to her and offered her the necessary funds to make the journey by diligence—sixty francs, the total amount of his *pourboires* as an apprentice, scraped together by slow degrees, and accepted by Pierrette with the sublime indifference of true friendship, which proves that, under similar circumstances, she would have been offended by a display of gratitude. Brigaut went to Saint-Jacques every Sunday to play with Pierrette and encourage her. The sturdy mechanic had already served a blissful apprenticeship in the absolute and devoted protection due to the object of our affections, involuntarily selected. More than once he and Pierrette had sat, on Sundays, in a corner of the garden, embroidering their childish projects upon the veil of the future; the carpenter's apprentice would ride through the world, bestriding his plane, and make a fortune for Pierrette, who promised to wait for him.

In the month of October, in the year 1824, when she was just completing her eleventh year, Pierrette was entrusted by the two old people and the young mechanic, all terribly unhappy over the separation, to the conductor of the diligence from Nantes to Paris, with earnest entreaties to take good care of her and put her into the Provins diligence in Paris. Poor Brigaut! he ran like a dog behind the diligence, looking at his dear Pierrette, as long as he could. Despite the girl's signs to him he ran a full league outside the city; and, when he was exhausted, his eyes cast one last glance, wet with tears, at Pierrette, who wept when she could no longer see him. Pierrette put her head out at the door and saw her friend, standing motionless in the road, watching the heavy carriage move away. The Lorrains and Brigaut had so little knowledge of the world that the poor girl had not a sou when she reached Paris. The conductor, to whom the child talked about her rich relatives, paid her hotel bill at Paris, and collected the money from the conductor of the Troyes diligence, bidding him deliver Pierrette to her family, and collect charges from them, exactly as if she were a piece of luggage.

Four days after leaving Nantes, about nine o'clock one Monday evening, a good-humored, stout old conductor of the Messageries Royales took Pierrette by the hand, and while the passengers and luggage for the Provins office were being unloaded in the Grand' Rue, he led her, with no other luggage than two dresses, two pairs of stockings, and two

AT MADEMOISELLE ROGRON'S

"Good evening, mademoiselle and friends," said the conductor; "I have here a little cousin of yours; and a sweet little creature she is, faith. You have forty-seven francs to pay me, although your little one hasn't anything that weighs much; just sign my bill of lading."

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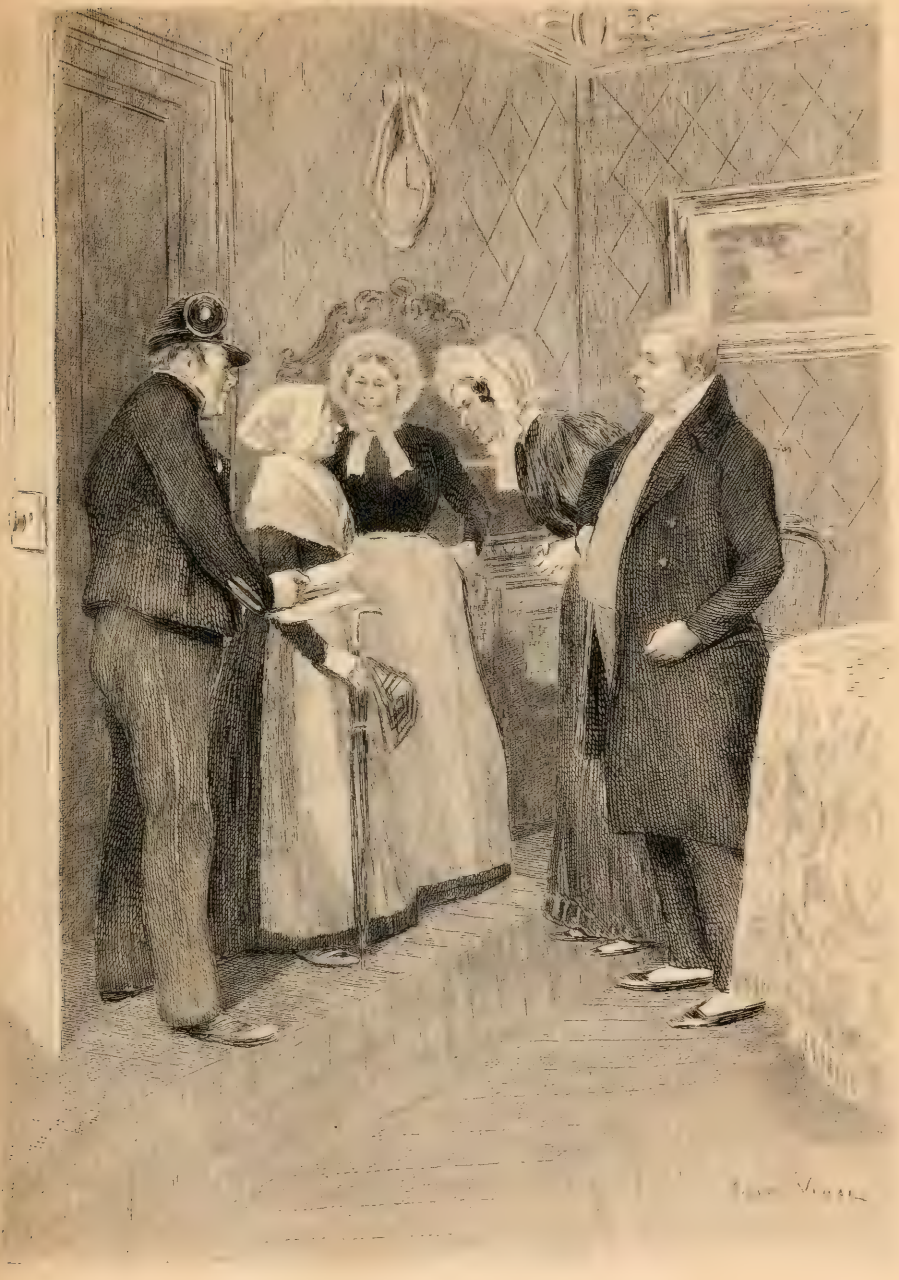

chemises, to Mademoiselle Rogron's house, which was pointed out to him by the manager of the office.

"Good evening, mademoiselle and friends," said the conductor; "I have here a little cousin of yours; and a sweet little creature she is, faith. You have forty-seven francs to pay me, although your little one hasn't anything that weighs much; just sign my bill of lading."

Mademoiselle Sylvie and her brother gave way to their delight and amazement.

"Excuse me," said the conductor, "my diligence is waiting; sign my way-bill, give me forty-seven francs sixty centimes—and whatever you choose for the Nantes conductor and myself, for taking care of the little one as if she was our own child. We advanced the money for her lodging, her meals, her passage to Provins and some other little things."

"Forty-seven francs twelve sous!" exclaimed Sylvie.

"You're not going to haggle over it, are you?" cried the conductor.

"What about the invoice?" said Rogron.

"Invoice? Look at the way-bill."

"When you've done jabbering, pay the man!" said Sylvie to her brother; "you see there's nothing else to do."

Rogron went to get forty-seven francs twelve sous.

"Are my comrade and I to have nothing for ourselves?" said the conductor.

Sylvie produced forty sous from the depths of the old velvet bag in which her keys were jangling.

"Thanks! keep it," said the conductor. "We prefer to have taken care of the little one for her own sake."

He took his bill and went out, saying to the buxom servant:

"What a barrack that is! There are crocodiles in other places than Egypt!"

"Those creatures are very vulgar," said Sylvie, who overheard the remark.

"But then, if they did take care of the little one!" said Adèle, putting her arms akimbo.

"We haven't got to live with him," said Rogron.

"Where are you going to put her?" the servant asked.

Such were Pierrette's arrival and reception at the home of her cousins, who gazed stupidly at her as she was tossed in at the door like a package, without any transition between the wretched chamber she occupied with her grandparents, and her cousins' dining-room, which seemed to her a palatial apartment. She was speechless and shamefaced. To any other than these ex-haberdashers, the little Bretonne would have seemed adorable in her skirt of coarse blue sacking, with her apron of pink calico, her heavy shoes, her blue stockings, her white neckerchief, her red hands in knitted mitts of red wool, edged with white, which the conductor had bought for her. In very truth, her little Breton cap, which had been laundered at Paris—it was rumpled in the journey from Nantes—framed her bright face like a halo. This national cap, of fine cambric, trimmed with stiff lace pleated in broad, flat folds, merits a particular description, it is so dainty and so simple. The light passing through the linen and the lace produces a shadow, a soft half-light upon the complexion; it gives it that virginal charm which painters seek upon their palettes, and which Léopold Robert has succeeded in copying in the Raphaelesque face of the woman holding a child in the picture of the *Reapers*. Within that frame festooned with light shone a pink and white, innocent face, animated by the flush of robust health. The heat of the skin brought the blood upward, and it circled with flame the two little ears, the lips, the end of the slender nose, and made the natural hue of the complexion appear even whiter by the contrast.

"Well, haven't you anything to say to us?" said Sylvie. "I am your cousin Sylvie and this is your cousin Rogron."

"Would you like something to eat?" Rogron asked her.

"When did you leave Nantes?" inquired Sylvie.

"She's dumb," said Rogron.

"Poor child, she has hardly any clothes at all," said stout Adèle, opening the package, which consisted of a handkerchief belonging to the old gentleman Lorrain.

"Come, kiss your cousin," said Sylvie.

Pierrette kissed Rogron.

"Kiss your cousin," said Rogron.

Pierrette kissed Sylvie.

"She's bewildered by the journey, poor child; perhaps she needs sleep," said Adèle.

Pierrette suddenly felt an invincible repugnance for her two relatives, a sentiment that no one had ever before aroused in her. Sylvie and the servant led the child to that one of the second floor chambers in which Brigaut had seen the white calico curtain. It contained a camp bed with a blue pole from which hung a calico curtain, a walnut commode without a marble top, a small walnut table, a mirror, a common night table without a door, and three wretched chairs. The walls, which sloped on the street side, were covered with a cheap paper, black flowers on a blue ground. The floor of colored, polished tiles was like ice to the feet. There was no carpet except a narrow list rug beside the bed. The mantelpiece, of cheap marble, was embellished with a mirror, two candelabra in gilded copper, a tawdry alabaster cup from which two pigeons drinking formed the handles, and which Sylvie had had in her chamber in Paris.

"Will you be comfortable here, my dear?" Sylvie inquired.

"Oh! it's lovely," the child replied in her silvery voice.

"She isn't hard to please," muttered the good-humored country girl. "Shan't I warm her bed?" she asked.

"Yes," said Sylvie, "the sheets may be damp."

Adèle brought one of her own nightcaps with the warming-pan. Pierrette, who had always slept between coarse spun Breton sheets, was amazed at the fineness and softness of the cotton ones. When she was installed in her new quarters and put to bed, Adèle could not help saying, as they went downstairs:

"Her stuff ain't worth three francs, mademoiselle."

Since the adoption of her economical system, Sylvie kept her servant in the dining-room, so that there should be but one light and one fire. But when Colonel Gouraud and Vinet came, Adèle withdrew to her kitchen. Pierrette's arrival enlivened the rest of the evening.

"We must see about an outfit for her to-morrow," said Sylvie.

"She hasn't any shoes except those heavy things she had on her feet, and they weigh a pound," said Adèle.

"That's the way it is in that country," said Rogron.

"How she looked at her room, which ain't any too fine for a cousin of yours, mademoiselle!"

"That's enough, hold your tongue," said Sylvie; "you see she's delighted with it."

"*Mon Dieu*, what chemises! they must scratch her skin; but none of this is good for anything," said Adèle, emptying Pierrette's package.

Master, mistress and servant were busily engaged until ten o'clock deciding of what kind of cotton and at what price the chemises should be made; how many pairs of stockings; what sort of material they should use for her underskirts and how many there should be; and estimating the cost of Pierrette's wardrobe.

"You won't get out of it for less than three hundred francs," said Rogron to his sister; he knew the price of everything and added them in his head as he used to do on Rue Saint-Denis.

"Three hundred francs?" cried Sylvie.

"Yes, three hundred francs! figure it up."

Brother and sister began again and made it three hundred francs, allowing nothing for making the garments.

"Three hundred francs at a single cast of the net!" said Sylvie, going to bed upon the idea ingeniously expressed by that proverbial expression.

Pierrette was one of those children of love whom love endows with its tenderness, its vivacity, its cheerfulness, its nobility, its devotion; nothing had hitherto changed or wounded her heart, with its almost uncivilized delicacy, and the welcome of her two relatives oppressed it grievously. If Bretagne was full of misery for her, it was full of affection too. If the old Lorrains were the most unsuccessful of tradespeople, they were the most loving, the most caressing, the most honest creatures on earth, like all those whose actions are not guided by calculation. At Pen-Hoël their granddaughter had received no other education than that of nature. Pierrette went about as she pleased, in a boat on the ponds, through the village and through the fields in the company of Jacques Brigaut, her playfellow, precisely like Paul and Virginia. Petted and caressed by everybody, free as air, they ran about after the thousand joys of childhood: in summer they went to watch the fishing, caught insects, picked flowers and worked in the garden; in winter they made slides, built beautiful ice-palaces and snow-men, or made snowballs and pelted each other with them. They were welcome everywhere and were always received with smiles. When the time for study arrived, disasters fell upon them. Jacques, being left penniless by his father's death, was apprenticed to a carpenter by his relatives, and supported by charity, as Pierrette subsequently was at Saint-Jacques. But, even in that private establishment, pretty Pierrette was still petted and caressed and made much of by everybody. The little creature, accustomed to so much affection, did not find in these relatives whom she had so longed to see, and who were said to be so wealthy, the manner, the words, the expression, the little pleasant ways which everybody, even strangers and conductors of diligences, had shown her. Her astonishment, which was already great, was increased by the different moral atmosphere that surrounded her. The heart experiences sudden changes of heat and cold just as the body does. Without knowing why, the poor child wanted to weep: she was tired out, and she slept.

Being accustomed, like all children brought up in the country, to rise early, Pierrette awoke the next morning two hours before the servant. She dressed pattered about in her chamber over her cousin's head, looked out on the little square, started to go downstairs, and was stricken dumb by the beauty of the staircase; she examined it in all its details, the *pateræ*, the copperwork, the ornaments, the painting, etc. Then she went down, could not open the garden door, went back to her room, went down again when Adèle was astir, and rushed into the garden; she took possession of it, ran down to the river, stared in open-mouthed amazement at the kiosk, then entered it; she continued to look about and to marvel at what she saw until her cousin Sylvie appeared. During breakfast the latter said to her:

"So it was you, my little pet, trotting up and downstairs at daybreak and making all that noise? You woke me up so thoroughly that I couldn't go to sleep again. You must be very careful, very quiet, and amuse yourself without making a noise. Your cousin Rogron doesn't like noise."

"You must take care of your feet too," said Rogron. "You went into the kiosk with your muddy shoes, and left your footprints on the floor. Your cousin Sylvie likes cleanliness. A big girl like you ought to be neat. Weren't you neat in Bretagne? But to be sure, when I used to go there to buy thread, I couldn't help pitying them, the savages! At all events, she has a good appetite," he added, looking at his sister; "one would think she hadn't had anything to eat for three days."

Thus, at the very outset, Pierrette was hurt by the remarks of both her cousins, hurt without knowing why. Her straightforward, frank nature, hitherto left to its own devices, knew nothing of reflection. She could not tell wherein her cousins sinned against her, but she was destined to be slowly enlightened by her suffering.

After breakfast, her two cousins, who were delighted with her innocent amazement and anxious to enjoy it to the full, showed her their magnificent salon in order to teach her to respect its sumptuous appointments. As a result of their isolation, and impelled by the moral necessity of interesting themselves in something, celibates are wont to replace the natural affections by factitious affections, to love dogs, cats, canary-birds, their maid-servant or their spiritual director. Thus Rogron and Sylvie had come to entertain an immoderate love for their furniture and their house, which had cost them so dear. Sylvie had ended by helping Adèle in the morning, having come to the conclusion that she had not the secret of cleaning and brushing furniture so that it retained its new look. Soon this cleaning became a regular means of passing time away, so that the furniture, far from losing its value, became more valuable in her eyes! To use it without wearing it out, without spotting it, without scratching the wood, without taking the gloss off the varnish,—that was the problem. This occupation soon became an old maid's mania. Sylvie had a collection of woolen rags, wax, varnish and brushes in a cupboard; she learned to handle them as well as a furniture polisher; she had her feather-dusters and her cloth-dusters; and she rubbed and rubbed without any fear of injuring herself, she was so strong! Her blue eyes, as cold and hard as steel, glanced over the furniture and even under it at every moment; so that it would have been an easier matter to find a sensitive fibre in her heart than a speck under a sofa.

After what was said at Madame Tiphaine's, it was impossible for Sylvie to take fright at three hundred francs. During the first week therefore, she was fully occupied and Pierrette constantly diverted by dresses to be ordered and tried on, by chemises and underskirts to be cut, to be made up by seamstresses on day wages. Pierrette did not know how to sew.

"She has been well brought up!" grumbled Rogron. "Don't you know how to do anything, my little duck?"

Pierrette, who knew how to do nothing but love, replied with a pretty childish gesture.

"How did you pass your time in Bretagne?" asked Rogron.

"I used to play," she replied artlessly. "Everybody played with me. Grandpa and grandma and everyone used to tell me stories. They all loved me dearly."

"Oho!" rejoined Rogron. "You did take it easy, didn't you?"

Pierrette opened her eyes to their fullest extent, not understanding this Rue Saint-Denis pleasantry.

"She's abashed," said Sylvie to Mademoiselle Borain, the best seamstress in Provins.

"She's so young!" said the seamstress, glancing at Pierrette, whose little face was turned up to her with a mischievous expression.

Pierrette preferred the seamstresses to her relatives; she was as playful as a kitten with them, watched them at work and made them pretty little speeches, the flowers of childhood, which Rogron and Sylvie were already repressing by fear, for they loved to impress a wholesome terror of themselves upon their subordinates. The seamstresses were delighted with Pierrette. However, the trousseau was not completed without some terrible grumbling.

"This child will cost us the very eyes in our heads!" Sylvie said to her brother.—"Come, stand still, child! Deuce take it, the clothes are for you, not for me," she would say to Pierrette, when some garment was being fitted to her;—or: "Just let Mademoiselle Borain work; you don't have to pay her day's wages!" when she saw her asking the head seamstress a question.

"Shall I stitch this behind, mademoiselle?" said Mademoiselle Borain.

"Yes, make it thoroughly strong; I don't want to make up such a trousseau every day."

It was the same with the little cousin as with the house. Pierrette must be as well dressed as Madame Garceland's little one. She had stylish shoes, of bronzed leather, like the little Tiphaine girl's.

She had very fine cotton stockings, corsets from the best maker, a blue rep dress lined with white taffeta, in order to hold her own with the younger Madame Julliard's daughter. The undergarments were in harmony with the exterior, Sylvie was so afraid of the keen scrutiny of mothers. Pierrette had pretty chemises of Indian calico. Mademoiselle Borain said that the sub-prefect's little girls wore fine linen drawers, with embroidered edging, the very latest style. Pierrette had drawers with ruffles. They ordered for her a lovely blue velvet hat lined with white satin, exactly like the little Martener girl's.

Thus Pierrette was the sweetest little creature in all Provins. On Sundays, at church, when mass was at an end, all the ladies kissed her. Mesdames Tiphaine, Garceland, Galardon, Auffray, Lesourd, Martener, Guépin and Julliard went into raptures over the lovely Bretonne. This commotion flattered old Sylvie's self-esteem; in her unwonted benevolence she thought not so much of Pierrette as of a triumph of vanity. However, Sylvie ended by taking offence at her cousin's success, and this is how it came about: people were constantly asking her to let Pierrette come to them; and, always with the idea of scoring a triumph over her enemies, she allowed Pierrette to go. Pierrette was in great demand to play with these ladies' little daughters, or to attend their little dinner-parties. In short, Pierrette succeeded infinitely better than the Rogrons. Mademoiselle Sylvie was sorely vexed that Pierrette should be asked to the others' houses when the others did not come to see Pierrette. The innocent child did not conceal the good times she had at the Tiphaines, Marteners, Galardons, Julliards, Lesourds, Auffrays and Garcelands, whose friendliness was in striking contrast to the constant nagging of her two cousins. A mother would have been very happy in her child's happiness, but the Rogrons had taken Pierrette for their own benefit, not for hers; their feelings toward her, far from being paternal, were stained with selfishness and with a disposition to make the most of her in a business way.

The fine trousseau, the lovely Sunday dresses and everyday dresses were the beginning of Pierrette's misery. Like all children who are left to amuse themselves as they please and to follow the impulses of their caprice, she wore out her shoes, boots and dresses, and, more than all else, her ruffled drawers, with alarming rapidity. A mother, when she reproves her child, thinks only of her; her voice is gentle, she does not raise it, except when her patience is exhausted and when the child persists in its naughtiness; but, in the great question of clothes, the cousins' crowns were the first consideration: their interests were to be regarded, and not Pierrette. Children have the keen scent of the canine race for the injustice of those who control them: they can tell with wonderful certainty whether they are loved or simply tolerated. Pure hearts are more troubled by slight shades of difference, than by decided contrasts; a child does not understand evil, but he knows when someone offends the love of the beautiful that nature has implanted in him. The lectures that Pierrette drew upon herself as to the manners that well-bred young women ought to adopt, as to modesty and economy were simply variations upon this main theme: "Pierrette is ruining us!" These scoldings, which resulted grievously for Pierrette, brought the two celibates back to the old commercial rut from which their removal to Provins had turned them aside, but in which their natures were fitted to bloom and flourish.

Accustomed as they had been to play the schoolmaster, to make remarks, to domineer over their clerks and reprimand them sharply, Rogron and Sylvie were languishing for lack of victims. Petty minds need to practise despotism to exercise their nerves, just as noble minds hunger for equality to exercise their hearts. Now, narrow-minded creatures expand by persecution as well as by benevolence; they can demonstrate their power by exerting their empire over another either cruelly or charitably, but they go in the direction in which their temperament impels them. Add self-interest as a motive power, and you will hold the key to most social problems.

Thenceforth, Pierrette became very necessary to the existence of her cousins. Since her arrival the Rogrons had been very much occupied with the trousseau, and, when that was completed, restrained by the novelty of the association. Every new thing, a sentiment, aye, even an opportunity to domineer, has to settle into its folds. Sylvie began by calling Pierrette *little one,* then she substituted plain *Pierrette.* The reprimands, bitter-sweet at first, became sharp and harsh. As soon as they entered upon that path, the brother and sister made rapid progress; they were no longer bored! It was not a conspiracy to be unkind and cruel, it was simply a foolish tyrannical instinct. The brother and sister believed that they were good friends to Pierrette, just as they used to think they were good friends to their apprentices. Pierrette, whose genuine, noble, excessive sensibility was the very antipodes of the rank insensibility of the Rogrons, had a horror of being scolded; she was hurt to the quick, so that her lovely, innocent eyes instantly filled with tears. She had a hard struggle to restrain her fascinating vivacity, which afforded so much pleasure elsewhere; she gave it full play at her little friends' houses; but, at home, toward the end of the first month, she began to be very quiet, and Rogron asked her if she were ill. At that strange question she rushed to the foot of the garden, to weep on the bank of the river, into which her tears fell, as she herself was destined to fall some day into the social torrent.

One fine day, despite her care, the child made a great rent in her fine rep dress, at Madame Tiphaine's, where she had gone to play. She at once burst into tears, foreseeing the stern reproof that awaited her at home. Upon being questioned she let fall some few words concerning her terrible cousin, amid her tears. Good Madame Tiphaine had some rep exactly like it, and she put in a new breadth herself. Mademoiselle Rogron discovered the trick that her devilish little cousin, as she expressed it, had played upon her. From that moment she refused to let Pierrette go to *those ladies*' houses.

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The new life Pierrette was to lead at Provins may be divided into three distinct periods. The first, in which she experienced a sort of happiness, varied by the unloving caresses of the two celibates and by reprimands that were so hard for her to bear, lasted three months. The prohibition of further visits to her little friends, attributed to the necessity of beginning to learn the things that a well brought-up child ought to know, marked the close of this first period of Pierrette's life at Provins, the only time when existence seemed endurable to her.

The internal commotion caused in the Rogron household by Pierrette's stay there was studied by Vinet and the colonel with the precaution of a pair of foxes contemplating a descent upon a poultry-yard, and disturbed to find that the place has a new inmate. They both called at the house from time to time in order not to frighten Mademoiselle Sylvie; they talked with Rogron upon divers pretexts and took possession of him with a reserve and formality that would have delighted the great Tartufe. The colonel and the advocate passed the evening with the Rogrons on the very day that Sylvie had refused in very bitter terms to allow Pierrette to visit the charming Madame Tiphaine. Upon learning of that refusal, the colonel and the advocate glanced at each other like people who knew all about Provins.

"She actually intended to insult you," said the advocate. "We warned Rogron a long time ago of what would happen. There's no good to be got out of those people."

"What can you expect of the anti-national party?" cried the colonel, twisting his moustaches, as he interrupted the advocate. "If we had tried to turn you away from them, you'd have thought we were influenced by our hatred in speaking so to you. But, mademoiselle, if you like your little game, why shouldn't you play boston here in your salon, in the evening? Is it impossible to find substitutes for such idiots as those Julliards? Vinet and I know the game and we'll find a fourth somewhere. Vinet can bring his wife; she's a nice woman, and, more than that, she's a Chargebœuf. You won't do as those hussies in the Upper Town do, and exact a duchess's toilet from a good little housewife, whom the infamous behavior of her family compels to do all her own work, and who combines the courage of a lion with the meekness of a lamb."

Sylvie Rogron showed her long, yellow teeth as she smiled at the colonel, who bore the shock of the horrible phenomenon extremely well, and even assumed a flattering expression.

"If there are only four of us, we shan't have boston every evening," she said.

"What do you expect of an old grumbler like me who has nothing to do but spend his pension? The advocate's at liberty every evening. Besides, you'll have people here, I promise you," he added with a mysterious air.

"It would enable us," said Vinet, "to take up our position openly against the ministerialists of Provins, and hold our own with them; you will see how people will take you up here in Provins; you'll have a great many of them on your side. You will drive the Tiphaines wild by setting up a salon in opposition to theirs. Oh! well, we'll laugh at them if they laugh at us. The *clique* do not mind what they say about you."

"How's that?" said Sylvie.

In the provinces there are more conduits than one through which gossip percolates from one social circle to another. Vinet had heard of everything that was said about the Rogrons in the salons from which they were definitively banished. The assistant judge and archæologist Desfondrilles belonged to neither party. The judge, like some other unattached persons, told everything that he heard in accordance with provincial custom, and Vinet had profited by his loquacity. The malicious lawyer instilled poison into Madame Tiphaine's jokes when he repeated them. By disclosing the mystifications to which Sylvie and Rogron had subjected themselves, he kindled the flame of indignation and aroused a revengeful spirit in those two hard natures, which needed an aliment for their petty passions.

Some few days later Vinet brought his wife, a well-bred, retiring person, neither pretty nor ugly, very meek, and profoundly conscious of her misfortunes. Madame Vinet was a blonde, somewhat worn by the labors of housekeeping, and very simply dressed. No woman could have pleased Sylvie more. Madame Vinet endured her airs and bent before her like a woman accustomed to bend. Upon her projecting forehead, upon her cheeks of the color of Bengal roses, in her languid, melting glance, there were traces of the deep meditation, of the far-seeing intelligence, that women accustomed to suffer bury in absolute silence. The influence of the colonel—who displayed to Sylvie a courtier-like grace apparently extorted from his natural military bluffness,—and that of the crafty Vinet soon reached Pierrette. Shut up in the house, or not allowed to go out except with her old cousin, Pierrette, the pretty squirrel, was constantly met with: "Don't touch that, Pierrette!" and with never-ending sermons as to the proper way to behave. Pierrette always leaned too far forward or was round-shouldered; her cousin wanted her to be as straight as she was herself, like a soldier presenting arms to his colonel; she sometimes gave her little taps on the back to make her straighten up. The free-hearted, joyous child of the Marais learned to repress her impulses, to imitate an automaton.

On a certain evening that marked the beginning of the second period, Pierrette, whom the three guests had not seen in the salon during the evening, came in to kiss her cousins and salute the company before retiring. Sylvie coldly turned her cheek to the lovely child, as if to avoid the necessity of kissing her. The movement was so cruelly significant that Pierrette's tears gushed out.

"Did you prick yourself, little Pierrette?" said the pitiless Vinet.

"What's the matter?" asked Sylvie severely.

"Nothing," said the poor child as she went to kiss Rogron.

"Nothing?" rejoined Sylvie. "People don't cry for nothing."

"What's the matter, my dear?" said Madame Vinet.

"My rich cousin doesn't treat me so well as my poor grandmother!"

"Your grandmother stole your fortune," said Sylvie, "and your cousin will leave you hers."

The colonel and the advocate exchanged a stealthy glance.

"I prefer to be robbed and loved," sobbed Pierrette.

"Well, we'll send you back where you came from."

"But what has the dear little girl done?" said Madame Vinet.

Vinet darted at his wife the terrible steely glare of those who exercise absolute domination. The poor serf, who was incessantly punished for not having the only thing he wanted of her—a fortune—took up her cards.

"What has she done?" cried Sylvie, tossing her head so suddenly that the yellow gilliflowers on her cap waved excitedly to and fro. "She can't invent things enough to vex us; she opened my watch to look at the works; she touched the wheel and broke the mainspring. Mademoiselle pays no heed to anything that's said to her. I spend all my time telling her to look out for things, and I might just as well talk to that lamp."

Pierrette, ashamed at being reprimanded in the presence of strangers, stole softly from the room.

"I am wondering how we can subdue that child's turbulent spirit," said Rogron.

"Why, she's old enough to go to boarding-school," said Madame Vinet.

Another glare from Vinet imposed silence on his wife, to whom he had been careful not to confide his plans and the colonel's touching the two celibates.

"This is what comes of burdening yourself with somebody else's children," cried the colonel. "You might have some of your own yet, you or your brother; why doesn't one of you marry?"

Sylvie bestowed a very kindly glance upon the colonel; for the first time in her life she met a man to whom the idea that she could possibly find a husband, did not seem ridiculous.

"Madame Vinet is right," cried Rogron; "that would keep Pierrette quiet. A master won't cost much."

Sylvie was so engrossed by the colonel's remark that she did not answer Rogron.

"If you choose to become surety for the opposition journal we were talking about, you would find a good master for your little cousin in the managing editor; we mean to take that poor schoolmaster, who was turned out by the invasion of the clergy.—My wife is right: Pierrette is a rough diamond and must be polished," said Vinet to Rogron.

"I thought you were a baron," said Sylvie to the colonel, during a deal and after a long pause during which each of the party was busy with his or her own thoughts.

"Yes; but I was made a baron in 1814, after the battle of Nangis, in which my regiment performed miracles; and did I have the necessary money or influence to arrange matters at the chancellor's office? It will be the same with the barony as with the rank of general I had in 1815—it would take a revolution to restore them to me."

"If a mortgage will be accepted for the guaranty," said Rogron at last, "I might do it."

"Oh! that can all be arranged with Cournant," replied Vinet. "The paper will ensure the colonel's triumph and make your salon more powerful than that of the Tiphaines and their cronies."

"How so?" said Sylvie.

While Madame Vinet was dealing the cards and her husband was explaining the power and influence that Rogron, the colonel and himself would acquire throughout the arrondissement of Provins by the publication of an independent sheet, Pierrette was weeping bitterly; her heart and her intelligence were in full accord; she considered her cousin much more at fault than herself. The child of the Marais understood instinctively that charity and benevolence should be absolutely unreserved. She hated her lovely dresses and everything that was made for her. They sold her their benefactions too dear. She wept with vexation because she had given them an advantage over her, and formed the resolution to so conduct herself as to reduce her relatives to silence, poor child! She thought what a noble thing it was for Brigaut to give her his savings. She believed that her misfortunes had reached their climax, and did not know that at that moment a new scheme to bring misery upon her was being discussed in the salon.

As a matter of fact, a few days later Pierrette had a writing-master. She was to learn to read and write and cipher. Pierrette's education caused tremendous havoc in the Rogron mansion. There was ink on the tables and chairs and clothes; then there were writing-books and pens on all sides, and powder on the furniture, books torn and dog-eared while she was learning her lessons. They began soon to talk to her—and in such terms!—of the necessity of earning her bread, of not being a burden to anybody. As she listened to these cruel words, Pierrette felt a choking sensation in her throat; the muscles contracted violently, and her heart beat as if it would burst. She was obliged to force back her tears, or they were sure to call her to account for them as a reflection upon the kindness of her magnanimous relatives.

Rogron had found the life that suited him; he scolded Pierrette as he used to scold his clerks; he sought her out when she was at play in order to force her to study, he made her repeat her lessons to him; he was a fierce monitor to the poor child. Sylvie, for her part, deemed it to be her duty to teach Pierrette the little she knew of the kinds of work that women do. Neither Rogron nor his sister had a suspicion of gentleness in their dispositions. The narrow-minded creatures, who derived genuine pleasure from tormenting the poor little girl, passed insensibly from mild treatment to the most excessive severity. They justified their severity by the alleged perverse disposition of the child, who, having begun to learn too late, was dull of comprehension. Her masters knew nothing of the art of putting their lessons in a form appropriate to the intelligence of the pupil—and in that very point lies the difference between private and public education. Thus the fault was not so much Pierrette's as her cousins'. She consumed an endless amount of time in learning the elements. For a mere nothing she was called a stupid blockhead, awkward and doltish. Incessantly maltreated by word of mouth, Pierrette met with none but cold, stern glances from her cousins. She acquired the dazed, stupid expression of a sheep; she dared do nothing when she saw that everything she did was ill-received, misjudged, misinterpreted. She awaited her cousin's pleasure, her commands, in everything, kept her thoughts to herself and took refuge in passive obedience. Her brilliant color began to fade. She complained sometimes of not feeling well. When her cousin asked her: "Where?" the poor child, feeling pains all over her body, answered:

"Everywhere."

"Did ever anyone hear of feeling sick everywhere? If that was so, you'd be dead before this!" retorted Sylvie.

"You may have a pain in your chest," said Rogron the caviler, "or the toothache, or a pain in your feet or your stomach; but no one ever had pains everywhere! What do you mean by everywhere? To have pains everywhere is to have no pain anywhere. Do you know what you're doing? you're talking for the sake of talking."

Pierrette ended by holding her peace, when she found her artless remarks, the flowers of her dawning mind, greeted with commonplace retorts which her good sense told her were ridiculous.

"You complain of not feeling well, and you have an appetite like a monk!" Rogron would say.

The only person who did not bruise the delicate flower was Adèle, the buxom maidservant. Adèle always warmed the child's bed, but she did it in secret after the night when she was detected bestowing this favor upon her employers' heir, and was scolded by Sylvie.

"Children should be brought up in a hardy way; that's the way to give 'em strong constitutions. My brother's health and mine isn't so bad, is it?" said Sylvie. "You'll make Pierrette a *picheline.*"

A word from the Rogron vocabulary, meaning a complaining, tearful person.

The angelic creature's affectionate glances were regarded as mere affectation. The roses of affection that blossomed, fresh and graceful, in that young heart, and longed to spread their foliage beyond its limits, were pitilessly crushed. Pierrette received the most cruel blows in the tenderest portions of her heart. If she tried to soften these two fierce natures by cajolery she was accused of making a show of affection to serve her own ends.

"Tell me at once what you want?" Rogron would cry brutally, "you certainly don't wheedle me for nothing."

Neither the brother nor the sister would listen to a suggestion of affection, and Pierrette was all affection. Colonel Gouraud, desirous of pleasing Mademoiselle Rogron, justified her in everything that concerned Pierrette. Vinet also supported the two cousins in all that they said against Pierrette; he attributed all of the sweet child's alleged misconduct to the obstinacy of the Breton character, and declared that no power, no determination could subdue it.

Rogron and his sister were flattered with consummate tact by these two courtiers, who had finally obtained from Rogron the necessary amount as guaranty of the newspaper, *Le Courrier de Provins*, and from Sylvie five thousand francs for shares. The colonel and the lawyer took the field. They placed a hundred shares at five hundred francs each among the electors who had bought national property, whom the liberal journals inspired with fear, among the farmers and among those people who were called independents. They eventually extended their ramifications through the department and even into some adjacent villages. Each shareholder naturally became a subscriber. The legal and other advertisements were divided between *La Ruche* and *Le Courrier.*

The first number of the newspaper contained a pompous eulogium of Rogron. Rogron was represented as the Laffitte of Provins. When the public mind was taken in hand, it was easy to see that the approaching election would be sharply contested.

Lovely Madame Tiphaine was in despair.

"Unfortunately," said she, as she read an article aimed at herself and Julliard, "unfortunately I forgot that there is always a knave not far from a dupe, and that folly always attracts a man of intellect of the species fox."

As soon as the newspaper began to cast its brilliant light for twenty leagues around, Vinet had a new coat and trousers and boots, and a decent waistcoat. He donned the famous gray hat of the liberals and allowed his linen to be seen. His wife took on a maid-servant and appeared dressed as the wife of an influential man should be; she wore pretty caps. Vinet was grateful, for reasons of his own. The advocate and his friend Cournant, the liberal notary and Auffray's rival, became Rogron's advisers, and performed two notable services for him. The leases given by Rogron's father, in 1815, under unfavorable circumstances, were about to expire. Horticulture and market-gardening had developed enormously around Provins. The advocate and the notary took measures to procure the Rogrons an increased rental of fourteen hundred francs upon renewing the leases. Vinet won two lawsuits for them, relative to certain plantations of trees, against two adjacent communes, about five hundred poplars being involved. The money for the poplars, together with Rogron's savings—he had invested six thousand francs yearly for the last three years at a high rate of interest—was very shrewdly employed in the purchase of several estates in proximity to their own. Lastly, Vinet undertook and carried through the ejectment of some of the peasants to whom the elder Rogron had lent money, and who had worn themselves out cultivating and improving their lands, in order to pay, but all in vain. The inroads upon the capital of the Rogrons caused by the restoration of the house, were thus repaired to a great extent. Their landed property, situated in the vicinity of Provins, selected by their father with the shrewd, good judgment of innkeepers, divided into small fields, the largest of which contained less than five acres, rented to well-to-do people, almost all of whom owned a bit of land of their own, and with the rents secured by mortgage, yielded at Martinmas 1826, five thousand francs. The taxes were paid by the farmers, and there were no buildings to be repaired or insured against fire.

The brother and sister each possessed forty-six hundred francs in the five per cents, and as they were above par, the advocate urged them to change the investment to real estate, promising to arrange matters, with the notary's aid, so that they should not lose a sou of interest.

At the close of this second period, life had become so great a burden to Pierrette, the indifference of the ordinary guests of the family, the incessant scolding and lack of affection of her relatives became so galling, she had so horrible a sensation as of the cold, damp air of the tomb blowing upon her, that she meditated the bold project of making her escape on foot, without money, to Bretagne, to join her grandfather and grandmother Lorrain. Two things occurred to prevent her. Goodman Lorrain died and Rogron was appointed his cousin's guardian by a family council held at Provins. If the grandmother had succumbed first, it is probable that Rogron, acting upon Vinet's advice, would have demanded Pierrette's eight thousand francs, and reduced the grandfather to indigence.

"Why, you may inherit from Pierrette," said Vinet with a ghastly smile. "No one knows who will live and who will die!" Incited by his words, Rogron left the widow Lorrain, as her granddaughter's debtor, no peace until he had compelled her to assure Pierrette of the reversion of the eight thousand francs by gift *inter vivos*, the expense of which was paid by him.

Pierrette was woefully depressed by her loss. At the moment that she received the horrible blow, she was about to attend communion for the first time; another matter which helped to detain her at Provins. This essential but simple ceremony was destined to lead to great changes in the Rogron household. Sylvie learned that Monsieur le Curé Péroux was the instructor of the little Julliards, Lesourds, the Garcelands and others. She made it a point of honor to secure for Pierrette the Abbé Péroux's vicar, Monsieur Habert, a man who was supposed to belong to the *Congregation*, very zealous in the interests of the Church, very much feared in Provins, and a man who concealed unbounded ambition beneath an undeviating sternness of principles. The priest's unmarried sister, a woman of thirty or thereabout, kept a school for young ladies in the town. The brother and sister resembled each other: both were thin, yellow, black-haired and bilious.

Like a true Bretonne, cradled in the poetic practices of Catholicism, Pierrette opened her heart and her ears to the words of this imposing priest. Suffering leads one to turn to religion, and almost all young girls, impelled by their instinctive gentleness, incline to mysticism, the profound side of religion. Thus the priest sowed the seed of the Gospel and the dogmas of the Church in excellent soil. He changed the current of Pierrette's thoughts completely. Pierrette loved the Jesus Christ presented to young girls in the communion service, as a divine fiancé; her physical and moral sufferings had a meaning, she was told to see the hand of God in everything. Her heart, which had been so cruelly wounded in that house, although she could make no charge against her cousins, took refuge in the sphere to which all unhappy mortals flee, supported by the wings of the three theological virtues. So she abandoned all thought of flight.

Sylvie, amazed at the metamorphosis that had taken place in Pierrette through Monsieur Habert's labors, was seized with curiosity. Thereupon Monsieur Habert, while preparing Pierrette to receive the sacrament, led back to God the lost soul of Mademoiselle Sylvie. Sylvie plunged into religion. Denis Rogron, however, upon whom the assumed Jesuit could make no impression—for at that time the spirit of His Liberal Majesty, the late *Constitutionnel I.*, had a stronger hold upon certain empty-headed mortals than the spirit of the church—Denis remained faithful to Colonel Gouraud, Vinet and the liberal cause.

Mademoiselle Rogron naturally made the acquaintance of Mademoiselle Habert, with whom she was in perfect sympathy. The two old maids loved each other like two loving sisters. Mademoiselle Habert offered to take Pierrette into her school, and to spare Sylvie the trouble and annoyance of her education; but she replied that Pierrette's absence would make too great a void in the house. The Rogrons seemed to be deeply attached to their little cousin.

When Colonel Gouraud and Vinet saw Mademoiselle Habert in the house on the square, they attributed to the ambitious vicar, in his sister's interest, the complement of the matrimonial plan formed by the colonel.

"Your sister proposes to marry you off," said the advocate to the quondam haberdasher.

"To whom?" demanded Rogron.

"To that old witch of a school-teacher," cried the old colonel, stroking his grizzled moustaches.

"She hasn't said anything to me about it," said Rogron innocently.

An energetic damsel like Sylvie was certain to make rapid progress in the path of salvation. The priest's influence in the household increased, supported as he was by Sylvie, who ruled her brother. The two liberals, not unreasonably alarmed, realized that, if the priest had determined to marry his sister to Rogron,—an infinitely more suitable match than Sylvie's with the colonel,—he would force Sylvie to the extremest limits in the way of religious practices, and would induce her to put Pierrette in a convent. They might therefore lose the fruit of eighteen months of strenuous effort, of cowardly persecution and of fawning. They conceived a fierce, sullen hatred of the priest and his sister; and yet they felt the necessity of following them step by step, of living on good terms with them.

Monsieur and Mademoiselle Habert, who knew whist and boston, came every evening. The assiduity of the one faction spurred on the assiduity of the others. The advocate and the colonel felt that they had to do with adversaries as strong as themselves—a feeling shared by the Haberts. Their respective situations already amounted to war. Just as Colonel Gouraud allowed Sylvie to taste the unhoped-for pleasure of being sought in marriage—for she had finally come to look upon the colonel as a man worthy of her—so Mademoiselle Habert enveloped the ex-dealer in small wares with the wadding of her attentions, her words and her glances. Neither of the two factions could say to the other those momentous words of international politics: "Let us divide the spoils!" Each was determined to secure the whole. Moreover, the two sly foxes of the opposition party in Provins, a party which was steadily gaining ground, made the mistake of deeming themselves stronger than the priesthood; they fired first.

Vinet, whose gratitude was aroused by the hooked fingers of personal interest, went to look up Mademoiselle de Chargebœuf and her mother. The two women had about two thousand francs a year upon which they lived in a poor way at Troyes. Mademoiselle Bathilde de Chargebœuf was one of those magnificent creatures who believe in marriage for love, and change their opinion toward their twenty-fifth birthday, on finding that they are still unmarried. Vinet succeeded in persuading Madame de Chargebœuf to add her two thousand francs to the thousand crowns he was earning since the establishment of the newspaper, and to come and live in his family at Provins, where Bathilde might marry, he said, an imbecile named Rogron, and, with her wit and beauty, enter into rivalry with the fair Madame Tiphaine.

The accession of Madame and Mademoiselle de Chargebœuf to Vinet's household and his opinions, imparted great solidity to the liberal party. The junction carried consternation to the hearts of the aristocracy and the Tiphaine party. Madame de Bréautey, shocked to see two women of noble birth thus led astray, begged them to join her circle. She bemoaned the mistakes committed by the royalists, and flew into a rage against those of Troyes, when she learned what the situation of the mother and daughter had been.

"What!" she said, "do you mean to say there wasn't some old country gentleman to marry the dear girl, who is made to be mistress of a château? They let her run to seed, and now she's going to throw herself at the head of a Rogron!"

She stirred up the whole department, but did not succeed in finding a single nobleman in a condition to marry a girl whose mother had only two thousand a year. The Tiphaine party and the sub-prefect also embarked, but too late, upon the search for that unknown. Madame de Bréautey made terrible accusations against the selfishness that was devouring France, the fruit of materialistic ideas, and of the power accorded by the laws to wealth; the nobility was no longer of any consequence! beauty counted for nothing! The Rogrons and the Vinets flung down the gauntlet to the King of France!

Bathilde de Chargebœuf had the advantage of her rival in the matter of dress as well as in that of personal charm. Her complexion was dazzlingly white. At twenty-five years of age her shoulders, which were entirely developed, her lovely figure, had an exquisite fulness. The roundness of her neck, the perfection of her muscular attachment, the abundance of her lovely fair hair, her charming smile, the distinguished shape of her head, the cut and carriage of her figure, her lovely eyes, well placed beneath a well-proportioned forehead, her noble, well-bred movements, and her still slender waist—in a word, everything about her was in perfect harmony. She had a beautiful hand and a small foot. Her robust health gave her something of the appearance of a pretty barmaid, "but that should not be a defect in the eyes of a Rogron," said Madame Tiphaine.

Mademoiselle de Chargebœuf made her first appearance very simply dressed. Her brown merino dress, with festoons of green embroidery, was cut low in the neck; but a muslin neckerchief, held in place by concealed strings, covered her shoulders, her back and her breast, although it opened a little in front, notwithstanding the fact that it was fastened together by a *sévigné*. As seen through that gauzy network, Bathilde's charms were even more dainty and seductive. She removed her velvet hat and her shawl upon her arrival, and showed her pretty ears adorned with gold pendants. She wore a little gold cross that glistened on her neck, and the velvet by which it was attached looked like the black ring that whimsical nature places on the tail of an Angora cat. She knew all the little tricks of girls on the lookout for a husband; how to show her hands in replacing locks of hair that are not displaced, to call attention to her wrists by asking Rogron to fasten a bracelet; which, by the way, the bewildered creature brutally refused to do, concealing his emotions beneath a pretence of indifference. The bashfulness of the only passion the haberdasher was ever to experience in his life, took on all the exterior aspect of hatred. Sylvie misconstrued it, and so did Céleste Habert, but not the advocate, the superior mind of that stupid circle, who had only the priest for an adversary, for the colonel had long been his sworn ally.

On his side, the colonel thenceforward bore himself toward Sylvie as Bathilde bore herself toward Rogron. He wore clean linen every evening; he had velvet collars to his coats, against which his martial face stood out in bold relief, supported by the two corners of his white shirt collar; he adopted the white piqué waistcoat and had a new frockcoat of blue broadcloth, in which his red rosette shone resplendent—all on the pretext of doing honor to the fair Bathilde. He ceased to smoke after two o'clock. His grizzled hair was flattened down in waves on his yellow skull. He assumed, in short, the external appearance and the attitude of a party leader, of a man who was preparing to expel the enemies of France, that is to say, the Bourbons, with drums beating.

The satanic advocate and the crafty colonel played Monsieur and Mademoiselle Habert a still more cruel trick than the introduction of the fair Mademoiselle de Chargebœuf, who was pronounced by the liberal party and by the Bréautey circle to be ten times fairer than the fair Madame Tiphaine. These two notable small-town politicians gradually led people to believe that Monsieur Habert shared all their opinions. Provins soon spoke of him as a liberal priest. He was speedily summoned before the bishop and was compelled to forswear the Rogrons' evening parties; but his sister continued to go there. The Rogron salon was thenceforth firmly established and became a power in the land.

Thus, toward the middle of that year, political intriguing was carried on in the Rogron salon no less briskly than matrimonial intriguing. While the underground interests, buried in the hearts of the participants, were engaged in desperate struggles, the public conflict attained a fatal celebrity. Everyone knows that the Villèle ministry was overturned by the elections of 1826. In the polling at Provins, Vinet, the liberal candidate,—whom Monsieur Cournant had furnished with the essential property qualification by the purchase of an estate which was not paid for,—failed to carry the day against Monsieur Tiphaine. The president had a majority of only two.

In addition to Mesdames Vinet and De Chargebœuf, Vinet and the colonel, the party in the Rogron salon sometimes included Monsieur Cournant and his wife, and the physician Néraud, a man whose early life had been very stormy, but who now took life seriously; he had given himself up to study, so it was said, and had, according to the statements of liberal partisans, much greater means than Monsieur Martener. The Rogrons understood their triumph no more than they had understood their previous ostracism.

Lovely Bathilde de Chargebœuf, to whom Vinet pointed out Pierrette as an enemy, treated the latter with withering disdain. The general interest demanded the humiliation of that wretched victim. Madame Vinet could do nothing for the child, held fast as she was by implacable selfish interests which she finally understood. Except for the imperious command of her husband she would not have gone to the Rogrons; it pained her too much to witness the maltreatment of the pretty little creature, who would cling to her, as if divining a protectress, and beg her to show her how to do this or that stitch, and to teach her embroidery. Pierrette thus showed that, if treated kindly, she could understand and succeed wonderfully well. But Madame Vinet ceased to be useful, so she came no more.

Sylvie, who still cherished the thought of marriage, saw an obstacle in Pierrette; Pierrette was nearly fourteen; her pallor, a symptom that was neglected by the ignorant old maid, was wonderfully becoming to her. Sylvie thereupon conceived the brilliant idea of making up for the cost of Pierrette's maintenance by making a servant of her. Vinet, as representing the Chargebœufs, Mademoiselle Habert, Gouraud, all the influential habitués of the salon, advised Sylvie to dismiss the big Adèle. Could not Pierrette cook and take care of the house? If there were too much work, she could take the colonel's housekeeper, a very accomplished person and one of the blue ribbons of Provins. Pierrette ought to know how to cook, said the wicked advocate, and to sweep and scour, to keep a house clean, go to market, and learn the price of things.

The poor child, whose devotion equaled her generosity, offered herself to the sacrifice, overjoyed to pay thus for the hard bread she ate in that house. Adèle was sent away. Thus Pierrette lost the only person who might perhaps have protected her. Notwithstanding her strength of will, she was from that moment crushed physically and morally. The brother and sister had much less consideration for her than for a servant; she belonged to them! She was scolded for trifles, for neglecting to wipe a speck of dust from the marble mantel or from a glass globe. The magnificent objects she had so much admired became hateful to her. Despite her desire to do her duty, her inexorable cousin always found something to complain of in what she had done. In two years Pierrette did not receive one syllable of commendation, did not hear an affectionate word. Happiness to her consisted in not being scolded.

She bore with angelic patience the brutal ill-humor of the two celibates, to whom kindly sentiments were entirely unknown, and who made her feel her dependence every day. This life, between the two ex-haberdashers, as if she were squeezed between the two lips of a vise, aggravated her disease. She experienced such violent internal distress, such sudden explosions of secret grief, that her natural development was irremediably deranged.

Thus Pierrette arrived, by slow degrees, through horrible, but hidden agony, to the condition in which her former playfellow saw her, when he serenaded her with his Breton ballad from the little square.

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Before entering upon the domestic drama which Brigaut's appearance precipitated in the Rogron household, it becomes necessary, in order to avoid digressions hereafter, to say a few words as to the young Breton's settlement in Provins, for he was in some sort a silent spectator of this drama.

When he ran away from the house, Brigaut was alarmed not only by Pierrette's warning gesture but by the great change in his young friend: he would hardly have recognized her, except for the voice, the eyes and the gestures that recalled his little playmate, always so bright and cheerful and withal so affectionate. When he was at a safe distance from the house his legs trembled beneath him; he felt hot flushes running up and down his back! He had seen Pierrette's ghost, not Pierrette herself. He climbed up to the Upper Town, thoughtful and ill at ease, until he had found a spot from which he could see the square and Pierrette's house; he gazed sadly at it, buried in thought, as if some misfortune were impending of which he could not see the end. Pierrette was ill, she was unhappy, she regretted Bretagne! what was the matter with her? All these thoughts passed in and out of Brigaut's heart, rending it sorely, and revealing to himself the extent of his affection for his little adopted sister. It rarely happens that passions really exist between children of different sexes. The charming romance of Paul and Virginia does not solve the question raised by this curious fact in morals, any more than the story of Pierrette and Brigaut. Modern history offers no exception other than the illustrious one of the sublime Marchioness of Pescara and her husband: destined for each other by their parents, when they were fourteen years old, they adored each other and were married; their union presented the spectacle of infinite, unclouded conjugal affection. Widowed at thirty-four, the marchioness, lovely, clever, universally adored, refused the hand of kings and buried herself in a convent where she saw and talked with no one but nuns.

Such an intense passion suddenly developed in the heart of the poor Breton mechanic. Pierrette and he had so often protected each other; he had been so happy over giving her the money for her journey, he had nearly killed himself running after the diligence, and Pierrette knew nothing about it! That memory had often warmed the cold hours of his toilsome life during those three years. He had educated himself for Pierrette, he had learned his trade for Pierrette, he had gone to Paris for Pierrette, proposing to make a fortune there for her. After passing a fortnight in the capital, he could not resist the longing to see her; he had walked from Saturday night to Monday morning; he intended to return to Paris, but the touching aspect of his little friend held him at Provins. A powerful magnetic force, the existence of which is still denied in the face of abundant proof, acted upon him without his knowledge; tears gathered in his eyes while tears were blinding Pierrette. If he represented Bretagne and her happy childhood to her, she represented life itself to him!

At sixteen years of age Brigaut had not yet learned to draw plans or to make a sketch of a cornice; there were many things he did not know; but, at piecework, he had earned as much as four or five francs a day. He was able to make a living at Provins therefore, and he would be near Pierrette; he would finish learning his trade with the best carpenter in the town, and would watch over Pierrette. In a moment, Brigaut's mind was made up. He hastened to Paris, settled up his accounts, and got his certificate, his baggage and his tools. Three days later he was employed as a journeyman by Monsieur Frappier, the leading carpenter of Provins. Active, sober workmen, indisposed to make trouble and enemies of the wine shop, are so rare that masters like to find a young man like Brigaut. To conclude the Breton's story in this respect, after a fortnight he became head journeyman, and boarded and lodged with Frappier, who taught him how to make estimates and linear draughting.

Frappier lived on the Grand' Rue about a hundred steps from the little square at the other end of which was the Rogron house. Brigaut buried his love in his heart and did not commit the slightest imprudence. He learned the story of the Rogrons from Madame Frappier, and she told him how the old innkeeper had manœuvred to obtain goodman Auffray's property. Brigaut also gleaned some information concerning the characters of Rogron, the haberdasher, and his sister. He surprised Pierrette at the market with her cousin in the morning, and shuddered to see on her arm the heavy basket filled with provisions. He saw her again on Sunday at church, where she appeared in her fine clothes. There, for the first time, Brigaut realized that Pierrette was Mademoiselle Lorrain. Pierrette saw him, but made a mysterious sign to him, urging him to remain well hidden. There was a multitude of things in that gesture, as in the one by which she had bade him fly, a fortnight before. How great a fortune must he not make in ten years, if he would marry the little friend of his childhood, to whom the Rogrons would leave a house, a hundred acres of land and twelve thousand francs a year, to say nothing of their savings? The persevering Breton did not choose to tempt fortune without having acquired the knowledge that he lacked. As between acquiring it at Provins and acquiring it at Paris, so long as it was simply a matter of theoretical instruction, he preferred to remain near Pierrette, to whom, moreover, he desired to explain his plans and the species of protection upon which she could rely. In fact, he did not wish to leave her until he had penetrated the mystery of the pallor which was already attacking life in the organs which life abandons last of all—the eyes; until he knew the source of the suffering that gave her the appearance of one bending beneath the scythe of death, and ready to fall. Those two touching gestures, which did not betoken any interruption of their friendship, but enjoined the greatest reserve, sent a thrill of terror through the Breton's heart. Evidently Pierrette intended to bid him wait and not attempt to see her; that in any other course there was danger for her. As she left the church she glanced at him, and Brigaut saw tears in her eyes. The Breton could have learned how to square the circle before he could guess what had taken place in the Rogron household since his arrival.

Not without keen apprehension did Pierrette come down from her room on the morning when Brigaut had appeared in her morning dream like another dream. Before leaving her bed and opening her window, Mademoiselle Rogron must have heard the song and the words, and compromising enough the words would sound in the ears of an old maid; but Pierrette knew nothing of the facts that made her cousin so alert. Sylvie had weighty reasons for rising and rushing to her window. For about a week past strange, mysterious occurrences, cruel emotions, had agitated the minds of the principal personages of the Rogron salon. These mysterious occurrences, carefully cloaked on both sides, were about to fall like an avalanche of snow upon Pierrette.

A multitude of mysterious things, which perhaps we ought to call the uncleannesses of the human heart, lie at the base of the greatest revolutions, political, social or domestic; but, in telling what they are, it may be well to explain that their algebraic expression, although accurate, is not reliable in the matter of form. Such profound schemes do not speak as brutally as history makes them speak. To undertake to translate the circumlocutions, the oratorical precautions, the long conversations, in which the mind purposely obscures the light it carries, in which the honeyed word dilutes the venom of the real purpose, would be to embark upon a work as long as the magnificent poem called *Clarissa Harlowe.*

Mademoiselle Habert and Mademoiselle Sylvie were equally desirous to marry; but the former was ten years younger than the other, and the probabilities justified Céleste Habert in thinking that her children would have the whole fortune of the Rogrons. Sylvie was approaching forty-two, an age at which marriage may be attended with danger. When they confided their ideas to each other to ask each other's approval, Céleste Habert, acting upon the revengeful abbé's instructions, enlightened Sylvie as to the alleged perils of her position. The colonel, a full-blooded man, with the vigorous health of a soldier, a hale and hearty buck of forty-five, might well put in practice the moral of all fairy tales: *They were happy and had many children.* This idea of happiness made Sylvie shudder; she was afraid to die; the thought of death always causes havoc in the mind of a celibate.

But the Martignac ministry, the fruit of the second victory of the Chamber that overturned the Villèle ministry, was appointed. The Vinet party held its head high in Provins. Vinet, now the leading advocate in Brie, *earned whatever he chose*, as was commonly said. Vinet was a personage. The liberals prophesied his accession to office; he would certainly be a deputy or a procureur-général. As for the colonel, he would be mayor of Provins. Ah! to reign as Madame Garceland reigned, to be the wife of the mayor! Sylvie was defenceless against that prospect; she determined to consult a physician, although a consultation might cover her with ridicule. These two old maids, one triumphant over the other and sure of holding her in leading-strings, invented one of those snares that women guided by a priest are so clever in laying. To consult Monsieur Néraud, the liberal physician and Monsieur Martener's rival, would be a mistake. Céleste Habert offered to conceal Sylvie in a closet, and to consult Monsieur Martener—who was the physician to her establishment—upon the same subject in her own interest. Whether he was or was not in league with Céleste, Martener informed her that the danger, although trifling, existed even in an unmarried woman of thirty.

"But your constitution," he said in conclusion, "makes it perfectly safe for you."

"And how about a woman past forty?" inquired Mademoiselle Céleste Habert.

"A married woman of forty, who has had children, need have no fear."

"But an unmarried woman, and virtuous, very virtuous; like Mademoiselle Rogron for instance?"

"Virtuous! there's no doubt of that," said Monsieur Martener. "A successful *accouchement* under such circumstances is one of the miracles which God sometimes performs, but very rarely."

"Why so?" said Céleste.

The doctor answered with a pathological description of the most alarming kind; he explained how the elasticity imparted by nature to the muscles and the bones in youth, ceases to exist at a certain age, especially in the case of women who have long followed a sedentary occupation, like Mademoiselle Rogron.

"So then, a virtuous unmarried woman who is past forty, ought not to marry?"

"Or else she ought to wait," replied the doctor; "but in that case it is not marriage, but simply a union of interests; if not that, what is it?"

The result of this interview was a clear, serious, scientific, well-reasoned opinion that a virtuous maid of over forty years ought not to marry. When Monsieur Martener had gone, Mademoiselle Céleste Habert found Mademoiselle Rogron all green and yellow, with dilated eyes,—in a lamentable state, in fact.

"Do you love the colonel so dearly?" said she.

"I still had hopes," the old maid replied.

"Well, wait!" cried Mademoiselle Habert jesuitically, knowing that time would settle matters for the colonel.

But the morality of such a marriage was doubtful. Sylvie sought enlightenment for her conscience in the confessional. Her stern director explained the judgment of the Church, which sees in marriage only a means to the propagation of humanity, which frowns upon second marriages and visits its displeasure upon passions that have no social end in view. Sylvie Rogron's perplexity knew no bounds. Her internal struggles gave extraordinary force to her passion and endowed it with the inexplicable attraction that forbidden things have had for women since the days of Eve. Mademoiselle Rogron's trouble could not escape the advocate's piercing eye.

One evening, after the game, Vinet drew near his dear friend Sylvie, took her hand, and led her to a seat upon one of the couches.

"Something is troubling you?" he said in her ear.

She bowed sadly. The advocate waited until Rogron had left him alone with the old maid and then proceeded to probe the wound in her heart.

"Well played, abbé! but you have played my game," he exclaimed inwardly, as he listened to the story of all Sylvie's secret consultations, of which the last was the most terrible of all.

The crafty legal fox was even more alarming than the physician in his remarks; he advised marriage, but not for ten years or thereabout in order to be perfectly safe. The advocate swore that the Rogrons' whole fortune should belong to Bathilde. He rubbed his hands, his nose became thinner than ever, as he ran after Madame and Mademoiselle de Chargebœuf, whom he had sent on ahead with their servant armed with a lantern.

The influence exerted by Monsieur Habert, minister to the soul, was exactly offset by Vinet, minister to the purse. Rogron was not at all religious; thus the man of the Church and the man of the law, two black gowns, were evenly matched. Upon learning of the victory won by Mademoiselle Habert, who expected to marry Rogron, over Sylvie, who was hesitating between the fear of death and the bliss of being a baroness, the advocate saw a possibility of driving the colonel off the field. He knew Rogron well enough to find some way of marrying him to the fair Bathilde. Rogron had not been able to resist the attacks of Mademoiselle de Chargebœuf. Vinet knew that the first time Rogron was alone with Bathilde and himself, their marriage would be arranged. Rogron had reached the point of fixing his eye upon Mademoiselle Habert in order not to look at Bathilde. Vinet had discovered how much Sylvie cared for the colonel. He understood the extent of such a passion in the case of an old maid who was equally consumed by religious fervor; and he soon hit upon a way of ruining Pierrette and the colonel at one stroke, hoping to be rid of one by means of the other.

On the morning after the audience he met, as usual, the colonel and Rogron walking together.

When these three men were together, that fact always set people's tongues in motion. This triumvirate, who were held in horror by the sub-prefect, the magistrates and the Tiphaine party, formed a tribunal of which the liberals of Provins were proud. Vinet edited *Le Courrier* personally, he was the head of the party; the colonel, the responsible manager of the paper, was its arm; Rogron with his money was the nerve-centre, he was supposed to be the connecting link between the governing committee at Provins and the governing committee at Paris. If you could believe the Tiphaines, these three men were always devising some scheme against the government, while the liberals admired them as the defenders of the people. When Rogron started toward the square, summoned homeward by the approach of the dinner hour, the advocate took the colonel's arm and prevented his accompanying the ex-haberdasher.

"Well, colonel," said he, "I'm going to take a great load off your shoulders; you can make a better match than Sylvie; if you play your cards well, you can marry little Pierrette Lorrain within two years."

And he told him of the Jesuit's manœuvre and its results.

"What a deep game, and what a long job they make of it!" said the colonel.

"Colonel," resumed Vinet seriously, "Pierrette is a charming creature; you can be happily settled for the rest of your days, and your health is so robust that the marriage won't be attended by the drawbacks that are customary where there is such disproportion of ages; but don't imagine that this exchange of a horrible fate for an agreeable one is a simple matter. To transform one's sweetheart into a confidante is as perilous as is the passage of a river under the enemy's fire, in your own profession. Being a shrewd old colonel of cavalry, you will study the position and make your dispositions with the superior judgment we have exhibited thus far, which has won our present position for us. If I am procureur-général some day, you may command the department. Ah! if you had been an elector we should be farther advanced than we are; I would have bought the votes of those two clerks, by indemnifying them for the loss of their places, and we should have had a majority. I should be sitting beside the Dupins, the Casimir-Periers, and—"

The colonel had long been thinking of Pierrette, but he concealed his thoughts with profound dissimulation; so that his brutal manner to her was only on the surface. The child could not understand why one who claimed to have been a comrade of her father should treat her so badly, especially when he always put his hand under her chin and gave her a fatherly kiss if he met her alone. After Vinet's confidential communication relative to Sylvie's terror at the thought of marriage, Gouraud sought opportunities to be alone with Pierrette, and the rough colonel became as gentle as a cat: he told her what a gallant fellow Lorrain was, and how unfortunate it was for her that he should be dead.

Some days before Brigaut's arrival, Sylvie had surprised Gouraud and Pierrette together. Jealousy had thereupon taken possession of her heart with monastic violence. Jealousy, a passion eminently credulous and suspicious, is the one in which the fancy acts most freely; but it does not quicken the intelligence, it deadens it; and in Sylvie's case, that passion was destined to lead her to strange ideas. Sylvie fancied that the man whom she had heard sing *My Lady Bride*, to Pierrette, was the colonel. Sylvie was certain that she was right in charging this rendezvous to the colonel, for his manner to her had seemed changed for a week past. He was the only man who had ever taken heed of her in the whole course of her life of solitude; she therefore watched him with all her eyes, with all her understanding; and, by dint of abandoning herself to hopes that were alternately flourishing and crushed, she had made so great a matter of it, that she experienced effects similar to those of a moral mirage. To employ an apposite popular expression, by dint of staring so hard she often saw nothing at all. She alternately repelled and combated triumphantly the idea of this chimerical rivalry. She drew a parallel between herself and Pierrette; she was forty years old and had gray hair; Pierrette was a lovely, pale little girl, with eyes that were loving enough to warm a dead heart. She had heard it said that men of fifty were fond of little girls of the Pierrette variety. Before the colonel settled down and began to frequent the Rogron salon, Sylvie had heard strange tales concerning him and his moral character, at Madame Tiphaine's. Old maids have, in love, the exaggerated Platonic ideas which young girls of twenty profess; they cling to absolute doctrines, like all those who have had no experience of life and have not learned how the greater social forces modify, impair and destroy those noble and beautiful ideas.

The thought of being deceived by the colonel was torture to Sylvie's brain. During the time therefore that every unemployed celibate passes in bed after awaking in the morning, the old maid's mind dwelt upon that thought, upon Pierrette and upon the ballad that had awakened her with the word—*marriage.* Like a silly girl, instead of peeping at the lover through her blinds, she had opened her window, forgetting that Pierrette might hear her. If she had had the common shrewdness of the spy, she would have seen Brigaut, and the fatal drama then begun would not have taken place.

*

Despite her weakness, Pierrette took down the wooden bars that secured the kitchen shutters, opened them and fastened them back. Then she went to open the door of the hall leading into the garden. She took the different brooms she required for sweeping the carpet in the salon, the dining-room, the hall, the stairs,—to put everything to rights, in short, with a painstaking care that no paid servant, even a Dutch girl, would ever put into her work: she hated so to be reprimanded! For her, happiness consisted in seeing her cousin's little pale, cold blue eyes,—not satisfied, that they never were,—but simply calm, after she had cast her proprietary glance over everything, that indescribable glance that sees things that escape the most observant eyes.

Pierrette's flesh was already moist when she returned to the kitchen to put everything in order there, to light the fires so that she might carry hot coals to her cousins' rooms when she took them the hot water for their toilet—something that she never had for her own! She set the table for breakfast and made a fire in the stove in the salon. In the course of these different duties she had sometimes to go to the cellar for wood, and was constantly leaving a cool place for a hot one, a hot one for a cold, damp one. These sudden transitions, made with the alertness of youth, often to avoid a harsh word or to obey an order, aggravated beyond remedy the condition of her health. Pierrette did not know that she was sick. But she began to suffer; she had strange appetites which she did not divulge; she craved uncooked salads and devoured them in secret. The innocent child was entirely ignorant that her condition indicated a serious illness and demanded the greatest care. If Néraud, who had reason to reproach himself with the grandmother's death, had disclosed her dangerous condition to the grandchild before Brigaut's arrival, Pierrette would have smiled; she found life too full of bitterness not to smile at death. But, for the last few moments, she, whose physical suffering was increased by the Breton homesickness, a mental malady so well recognized that the colonels of regiments respect it among the Bretons in their commands, she loved Provins! The glimpse of that golden flower, the song, the presence of her former playmate, had given her new life, as a plant, long deprived of water, revives after a long rain. She wanted to live, she forgot that she had suffered.

She crept timidly into her cousin's room, made the fire, exchanged a few words with her, left the hot water, and went to wake her guardian; then she went downstairs to take in the milk and bread and the other supplies brought by the dealers. She stood for some time on the doorstep, hoping that Brigaut would know enough to return; but Brigaut was already on the way to Paris. She had put the salon in order and was at work in the kitchen when she heard her cousin coming downstairs. Mademoiselle Sylvie Rogron appeared in her brown silk dressing-gown, on her head a tulle cap trimmed with bows, her false front put on askew, her night-dress above her gown and her feet in slippers that were sadly down at the heel. She passed everything in review, then went out to her cousin who was waiting to learn what she wanted for breakfast.

"Ah! there you are, mademoiselle light-o'-love?" said Sylvie in a half-bantering, half-mocking tone.

"I beg your pardon, cousin?"

"You crept into my room like a sly cat and went out the same way; and yet you must have known that I had something to say to you."

"To me?"

"You had a serenade this morning like any princess."

"A serenade?" cried Pierrette.

"A serenade?" echoed Sylvie, mimicking her. "And you have a lover."

"What is a lover, cousin?"

Sylvie ignored the question and said to her:

"Dare to tell me, mademoiselle, that a man didn't come under our windows and talk about marriage to you!"

Persecution had taught Pierrette the stratagems that are necessary to slaves, and she replied boldly:

"I don't know what you mean—"

"My dog!" said Sylvie, sharply.

"Cousin," continued Pierrette, humbly.

"You didn't get out of bed either, I suppose, and you didn't go to your window in your bare feet, which will be worth a good sharp sickness to you. Get sick! It will serve you just right. And perhaps you didn't speak to your lover?"

"No, cousin."

"I knew you had many faults, but I didn't know you were a liar. Think it over carefully, mademoiselle! You must tell your cousin and me all about the scene of this morning or else your guardian will see about taking harsh measures."

The old maid, consumed with jealousy and curiosity, resorted to intimidation. Pierrette did as people do who suffer beyond their strength: she held her peace. Silence is to the person attacked the only sure means of triumph; it tires out the furious charges of the envious, the savage onsets of the enemy; it ensures a complete and crushing victory. What can be more perfect than silence? It is absolute; and is it not one of the attributes of infinity? Sylvie stealthily examined Pierrette. The child was blushing, but the blush was not general over her whole face; it appeared upon her cheekbones, in irregular, burning spots of a significant hue. Upon seeing those symptoms of ill health a mother would at once have changed her tone, she would have taken the child on her knees and questioned her, she would long since have noticed the innumerable tokens of Pierrette's absolute, sublime innocence, she would have divined her illness and realized that the humors and the blood, turned aside from their proper channels, were being forced upon the lungs after they had deranged the digestive functions. Those eloquent spots would have apprised her of the imminence of grave danger. But an old maid, in whose heart the sentiments nourished by family affection had never been awakened, to whom the needs of childhood, the precautions demanded by adolescence, are unknown, could be expected to have none of the indulgence and sympathy inspired by the thousand and one incidents of family life. The sufferings of poverty, instead of softening her heart, had made it callous.

"She blushes, she is guilty!" said Sylvie to herself.

Thus Pierrette's silence was interpreted in the most unfavorable way.

"Pierrette," said she, "we'll have a little talk before your cousin comes down. Come," she added in a milder tone. "Shut the street door. If anyone comes they will ring and we shall hear them."

Notwithstanding the damp mist that was hovering over the river, Sylvie led Pierrette along the graveled path that wound among the grassplots, to the edge of the rockwork terrace, a picturesque little terrace covered with iris and aquatic plants. The old maid changed her tactics; she proposed to try to ensnare Pierrette by gentle treatment. The hyena proposed to turn cat.

"Pierrette," said she, "you are no longer a child, you will soon put your foot into your fifteenth year, and there'd be nothing astonishing in your having a lover."

"But, cousin," said Pierrette, raising her eyes with angelic sweetness to the sour, cold face of her cousin, who had assumed her saleswoman's expression, "what is a lover?"

It was impossible for Sylvie to define a lover accurately and with decency to her brother's ward. Instead of looking upon that question as the result of adorable innocence, she saw in it a proof of her false nature.

"A lover, Pierrette, is a man who loves us and wants to marry us."

"Ah!" said Pierrette. "When people agree to marry in Bretagne, we call the young man *the intended.*"

"Well, just remember that there's not the slightest harm in admitting your feeling for a man, my dear. The harm is in keeping it secret. Have you happened to make an impression on any of the men who come here?"

"I don't think so."

"Do you love anyone of them?"

"Not one."

"Quite sure?"

"Quite sure."

"Look at me, Pierrette."

Pierrette looked at her cousin.

"Didn't a man call to you from the square this morning?"

Pierrette lowered her eyes.

"You went to your window and opened it and spoke, didn't you?"

"No, cousin; I looked out to see what the weather was, and I saw a peasant on the square."

"Pierrette, since your first communion you have improved a great deal; you are obedient and pious, you love your relations and God; I am pleased with you, and I don't say it to swell you up with pride—"

The horrible creature took the abasement, the resignation, the silence of misery for virtues! One of the sources of sweetest consolation to the suffering, to martyrs and to artists, at the height of the divine passion that envy and hatred impose upon them, is to meet with praise where they have always met with censure and bad faith. Pierrette thereupon looked up at her cousin with melting eyes, and felt that she almost forgave her for all the pain she had caused her.

"But if it is all hypocrisy, if I must look upon you as a serpent whom I have warmed in my bosom, you will be a vile, miserable wretch!"

"I don't think I have any reason to blame myself," said Pierrette, her heart painfully oppressed by the sudden leap from unexpected praise to the snarling tone of the hyena.

"You know that a falsehood is a deadly sin?"

"Yes, cousin."

"Very well, you are in God's presence!" said the old maid, pointing solemnly to the garden and the sky; "swear that you didn't know this peasant."

"I will not swear," said Pierrette.

"Ah! it wasn't a peasant, you little viper!"

Pierrette ran away through the garden like a startled deer, terrified by the spectre of this moral question. Her cousin called her in an awful voice.

"Somebody rang," she replied.

"Ah! what a little slyboots!" said Sylvie to herself; "she has a cunning mind; and now I am sure that the little snake is twining round the colonel. She heard us say he was a baron. She'd like to be a baroness! little fool! Oh! I'll get rid of her by binding her out as an apprentice, and that right soon."

Sylvie was so absorbed in her thoughts that she did not see her brother as he came along the path, looking at the damage done to his dahlias by the frost.

"Well, Sylvie, what are you thinking about? I thought you were looking at the fish! sometimes they jump out of the water."

"No, I wasn't," she said.

"How did you sleep?"

And he began to tell her about the dreams he had had.

"Doesn't my complexion look *dauby?*"

Another word from the Rogron vocabulary.

Since Rogron had loved—let us not profane the word—, since he had desired Mademoiselle de Chargebœuf, he was much perturbed concerning his manners and appearance.

At that moment Pierrette came down the steps and announced from a distance that breakfast was ready. Sylvie's face, when she saw her cousin, turned green and yellow; all her bile stirred within her. She scrutinized the hall and concluded that Pierrette should have scrubbed it.

"I will scrub it, if you wish," the little angel replied, ignorant of the risk to which that sort of labor exposes a young girl.

The dining-room was in irreproachable order. Sylvie took her seat at the table, and throughout the meal pretended that she needed things which she would never have thought of had she been in a calm frame of mind, and which she asked for in order to make Pierrette leave her seat, selecting a moment when the poor child was beginning to eat. But mere annoyance was not enough, she was on the lookout for a subject of reproach, and she fumed inwardly because she could find none. If there had been boiled eggs, she would certainly have complained of the way hers was cooked. She hardly answered her brother's silly questions, and yet she looked at him all the time. Her eyes avoided Pierrette. Pierrette was extremely sensitive to such treatment. She brought Sylvie's coffee, as she did Rogron's, in a large silver goblet in which she heated the milk mixed with cream by putting it in boiling-water. The brother and sister themselves poured in the proper quantity of the black coffee made by Sylvie. When Sylvie had prepared her favorite draught with the most minute care, she discovered a slight speck of coffee; she seized upon it in the swirling yellow liquid, with affected horror, examined it and leaned over so that she could see it better. Then the storm burst.

"What's the matter with you?" said Rogron.

"The matter is—that mademoiselle has put ashes in my coffee. How pleasant it is to drink coffee made of ashes!—Oh! well, it's not surprising; no one can do two things at once and do them well. Much she was thinking of the coffee! A blackbird might have flown through her kitchen this morning and she'd never have seen it! how could she have seen the ashes flying about? And then it's her cousin's coffee too! She doesn't care for that."

She talked in that strain while she was placing the grain of coffee that had squeezed through the filter, on the edge of her plate, with a few bits of sugar that did not melt.

"Why, cousin, it's coffee," said Pierrette.

"Ah! so I'm the liar, am I?" cried Sylvie, turning her eyes upon Pierrette and blasting her with the angry gleam that shot from them.

Those organisms which the passion of love has not laid waste have at their command a great abundance of vital fluid. This phenomenon of the excessive brilliancy of the eye in moments of wrath was the better established in Mademoiselle Rogron's case, because in the old days, in her shop, she had had occasion to exert the power of her glance by opening her eyes to their fullest extent, always for the purpose of impressing her inferiors with healthful awe.

"I advise you to contradict me," she continued, "you who deserve to be made to leave the table and eat by yourself in the kitchen!"

"What in the world's the matter with you two?" cried Rogron. "You're like cranks this morning."

"Mademoiselle knows what I have against her. I will give her time to make up her mind before I speak to you, and in that I shall be kinder to her than she deserves!"

Pierrette looked out into the square in order to avoid looking at her cousin's eyes, which frightened her.

"She doesn't pretend to listen to me any more than if I were speaking to that sugar-bowl! Her ears are sharp enough, however; she talks from the top of a house and answers someone on the ground. She's a perverse creature, is this ward of yours! perverse beyond belief, and you needn't expect any good of her, do you hear, Rogron?"

"What has she done that's so very bad?" Rogron asked.

"It's pretty early to begin, at her age!" cried the enraged old maid.

Pierrette rose to clear the table, in order to have something to do: she did not know which way to turn. Although this sort of language was not new to her, she had never been able to accustom herself to it. Her cousin's wrath made her believe she had committed a crime. She wondered how much greater her rage would be if she knew of Brigaut's escapade. Perhaps they would take Brigaut away from her. The innumerable thoughts of the slave, profound and swift, passed through her mind at the same moment, and she resolved to maintain absolute silence concerning an incident in which her conscience told her there was nothing wrong. She was forced to listen to such harsh and bitter words, such insulting conjectures, that, when she returned to the kitchen, she was seized with a terrible pain in the stomach and a violent nausea. She did not dare complain, she was not sure that her complaints would be heeded. She returned to the dining-room, pale and wan, said that she did not feel well and went up to lie down, clinging to the rail from step to step, and believing that her last hour had arrived.

"Poor Brigaut!" she said to herself.

"She's sick!" said Rogron.

"She, sick! Bah! it's all a sham!" Sylvie rejoined in a loud voice, so that she could be overheard. "She wasn't sick this morning, anyway!"

This last shaft crushed Pierrette, who went to bed weeping bitterly and praying God to take her out of the world.

For about a month past Rogron had not had to carry *Le Constitutionnel* to Gouraud's quarters; the colonel came obsequiously to get the paper and have a chat, and he took Rogron out to walk when the weather was fine. Sure of seeing the colonel, therefore, and of having an opportunity to question him, Sylvie donned a coquettish costume. The old maid fancied that she made herself very captivating by wearing a green dress, a little yellow cashmere shawl with a red border, and a white hat with meagre gray feathers. When it was about time for the colonel to arrive, Sylvie stationed herself in the salon with her brother, whom she had forced to remain in his dressing-gown and slippers.

"It's a fine day, colonel!" said Rogron, when he heard Gouraud's heavy step, "but I'm not dressed; my sister thought she might want to go out, so she made me stay at home; wait for me."

Rogron left his sister and the colonel alone together.

"Where are you thinking of going, all dressed up like a goddess?" queried Gouraud, noticing a certain solemnity of expression on the old maid's ample, pock-marked face.

"I was going out; but as the little one isn't well, I shall stay at home."

"What's the matter with her?"

"I don't know; she asked if she might go to bed."

Gouraud's prudence, not to say distrust, was constantly aroused by the results of his alliance with Vinet. Clearly, the advocate's was the most desirable part. The advocate edited the newspaper, his control over its policy was absolute, he applied its income to the editing; while the colonel, the responsible manager, made very little out of it. Vinet and Cournant had rendered immense services to the Rogrons, while the colonel, being on the retired list, could do nothing for them. Who would be deputy? Vinet. Who was the great elector? Vinet. Who was always consulted? Vinet.

Lastly, he knew as well as Vinet the depth and extent of the passion kindled in Rogron's heart by the fair Bathilde de Chargebœuf. That passion was becoming frenzied, like all passions that assail men late in life. Bathilde's voice made him start. Absorbed as he was by his desires, Rogron concealed them, he did not dare hope for such an alliance. To sound the haberdasher, the colonel had informed him that he, Gouraud, proposed to ask for Bathilde's hand; Rogron turned pale at the thought of so formidable a rival, his manner to Gouraud became cold and almost savage. Thus Vinet was king in the Rogron establishment, while he, the colonel, had no other bond of union than the hypothetical one of an attachment that was feigned on his side and had not yet made itself manifest in Sylvie's manner. When the advocate described the priest's manœuvring and advised him to break with Sylvie and turn his attention to Pierrette, he flattered Gouraud's real inclination; but upon analyzing that suggestion in order to arrive at its true meaning, and upon carefully examining the ground about him, the colonel thought that he could detect a hope on the part of his ally of making trouble between himself and Sylvie, and of taking advantage of the old maid's fear of marriage to pour the whole of the Rogrons' fortune into the hands of Mademoiselle de Chargebœuf.

And so, when Rogron left him alone with Sylvie, the colonel's perspicacity seized upon divers trifling indications that betrayed a disturbance in Sylvie's mind. He detected her plan to be under arms when he arrived, and to be left alone with him for a moment. The colonel, who already vehemently suspected Vinet of playing some trick upon him, attributed this interview to some secret insinuation of that legal monkey; he assumed a watchful attitude, as if he were reconnoitring an enemy's country, keeping his eyes on the alert, quick to hear the slightest sound, all his senses on the *qui vive*, and his hand on his weapons. The colonel had the fault of not believing a word that women said; and when the old maid referred to Pierrette and said that she was in bed at noon, he thought that Sylvie, through jealousy, had simply sent her to her chamber to do penance.

"The little one is getting to be very pretty," he said with an unconcerned air.

"She will be pretty in time," said Mademoiselle Rogron.

"You ought to send her to Paris now to go into a shop," the colonel added. "She'd make a fortune there. All the milliners are looking for pretty girls to-day."

"Is that your honest opinion?" said Sylvie in a troubled voice.

"Good! I see what you're after," thought the colonel, "Vinet advised my marrying Pierrette some day, so as to ruin me in the estimation of this old witch.—Why, what do you intend to do with her?" he said aloud. "Haven't you right under your eyes a girl of incomparable beauty, Bathilde de

Chargebœuf, a girl of noble birth, with high connections, doomed to die an old maid? no one will take her. Pierrette hasn't a sou, she will never marry. Do you suppose youth and beauty count for anything with me, for instance; with me who, as a captain of cavalry in the Imperial Guard, as soon as the Emperor had a guard, have set my foot in every capital in Europe and known the prettiest women in those same capitals? Youth and beauty are devilish commonplace and silly!—don't mention them to me again. At forty-eight years of age," he said, making himself out older than he was, "when one has been through the retreat from Moscow and made the terrible campaign in France, one's loins are a little weary; I'm an old fellow now. A woman like you would take care of me and coddle me; and her fortune, added to my paltry pension of a thousand crowns, would make me comfortable in my old age; I should prefer such a one a thousand times over to a coquette who would annoy me in many ways, and who would be thirty years old and passionate when I am sixty and rheumatic. At my age, you see, a man has to look at a thing from every side. Between ourselves, I shouldn't want to have children if I should marry."

Sylvie's face had been like an open book to Gouraud during this harangue, and her exclamation at the end confirmed his conviction of Vinet's perfidy.

"Then you don't love Pierrette?" she cried.

"Nonsense! are you mad, my dear Sylvie?" rejoined the colonel. "Does a man try to crack nuts when his teeth are gone? Thank God, I'm in my right mind and know what I'm about."

Sylvie did not choose to bring herself into the game just then, and she deemed herself very clever in putting words into her brother's mouth.

"My brother," she said, "has had an idea of finding a wife for you."

"Why, your brother couldn't have had such an incongruous idea. Only a few days ago I told him that I was in love with Bathilde, just to get at his secret, and he turned as white as your stomacher."

"He loves Bathilde?" said Sylvie.

"Like a madman! And certainly Bathilde cares for nothing but his money.—Take that, Vinet!" thought the colonel.—"How, then, could he have spoken about Pierrette? No, Sylvie," he continued, taking her hand and pressing it significantly, "as you have broached the subject—" He drew nearer to her.—"Why"—he kissed her hand; he was a colonel of cavalry and had given proofs of courage—"why, let me tell you that I want no wife but you. Although our marriage might seem to be a marriage of convenience, for my part, I am very fond of you."

"But I am the one who *wanted* to marry you to Pierrette. And suppose I should give her my fortune—eh, colonel?"

"But I don't want to be unhappy at home, and, ten years hence to see a young popinjay like Julliard dancing attendance on my wife and writing poetry to her in the newspaper. I'm a little too much of a man in that direction! I would never marry anyone so much younger than I am."

"Well, colonel, we will have a serious talk on this subject," said Sylvie, bestowing a glance upon him which she believed to be overflowing with love, but which strongly resembled the glare of an ogress.

Her cold, purple lips drew apart disclosing her yellow teeth, and she thought she was smiling.

"Here I am," said Rogron, and he went away with the colonel, who saluted the old maid courteously.

*

Gouraud determined to hasten his marriage with Sylvie and thus to become master of the house, promising himself to get rid of Bathilde and Céleste Habert by virtue of the influence he would acquire over Sylvie during the honeymoon. So it was that, during their walk, he told Rogron that he was joking the other day; that he did not aspire to Bathilde, that he was not rich enough to marry a woman without a dowry; he then confided his project to him,—that he had chosen his sister long ago, on account of her many estimable qualities, and, in short, that he aspired to become his brother-in-law.

"Ah! colonel, ah! baron, if my consent is all you need, you can be married as soon as the law allows!" cried Rogron, overjoyed to be well rid of so formidable a rival.

Sylvie passed the whole morning in her apartment, calculating as to whether there was room for two there. She determined to build a second floor for her brother, and to have the first suitably arranged for herself and her husband; but she also determined, after the fashion of all old maids, to subject the colonel to certain tests, in order to judge of his heart and his morals before making up her mind. She still retained some doubt and wished to be sure that there was no collusion between Pierrette and him.

Pierrette came down at dinner-time, to lay the table. Sylvie had been obliged to do the cooking, and had spotted her dress, whereat she exclaimed: "Curse that Pierrette!" It was plain that, if Pierrette had cooked the dinner, Sylvie would not have dropped that bit of grease on her silk dress.

"Ah! you're there, are you, my pretty *picheline*? You're like the blacksmith's dog that sleeps under the forge till he hears the saucepans rattling! So you want people to believe you're sick, you little liar!"

The thought: "You didn't tell me the truth about what happened on the square this morning, therefore whatever you say is a lie," was like a hammer with which Sylvie constantly belabored Pierrette's heart and head.

To Pierrette's unbounded amazement, Sylvie sent her up to her room after dinner, to dress for the evening. The most vivid imagination does not equal the activity that suspicion imparts to an old maid's mind. At this juncture Sylvie surpassed politicians, solicitors and notaries, money-lenders and misers. She determined to consult Vinet, after carefully examining everything about her. She wished to have Pierrette at hand, so that she might tell by the little one's face if the colonel had told the truth.

Mesdames de Chargebœuf were the first to arrive. Acting upon the advice of her cousin Vinet, Bathilde had arrayed herself with unusual splendor. She was dressed in a lovely blue cotton velvet dress, with the same gauze fichu, bunches of grapes in garnet and gold at her ears, her hair in *ringlets*, the seductive cross with velvet band, tiny black satin shoes, gray silk stockings and *gants de Suède*. She had the airs of a queen together with the coquettish manners of a young girl, calculated to catch all the Rogrons in the river. The mother, calm and dignified, preserved, as did her daughter, a certain aristocratic insolence, with which the two women redeemed everything, and in which the spirit of their caste made itself manifest. Bathilde was endowed with a superior intellect, that only Vinet discovered after she and her mother had lived two months under his roof. When he had taken the measure of this girl, who was soured by the uselessness of her youth and beauty, and enlightened by the scorn inspired in her by the men of an epoch in which money was their only idol, Vinet cried out in surprise:

"If I had married you, Bathilde, I should be to-day in line of promotion to be Keeper of the Seals, my name would be Vinet de Chargebœuf, and I should have a seat on the Right!"

Bathilde was influenced by no vulgar ideas in her desire to be married; she did not marry to become a mother, she did not marry to have a husband; she married to be free, to have a responsible manager, to be called madame, and to be able to act as men do. Rogron to her was a mere name, she expected to make something of the imbecile, a voting Deputy, whose mind she would be; she longed to be revenged on her family, who had taken no notice of a poor girl. Vinet had greatly amplified and strengthened her ideas, while admiring and applauding them.

"Dear cousin," he said to her in the course of a discussion of the influence of women and of the sphere in which it was proper for them to act, "do you think that Tiphaine, a man of extreme mediocrity, will obtain a seat in the court of first instance at Paris by his own merits? Why, it was Madame Tiphaine who procured his election as Deputy, it is she who is pushing him ahead in Paris. Her mother, Madame Roguin, is a shrewd creature who does what she will with the famous banker Du Tillet, one of Nucingen's associates, both of them being connected with the Kellers; and those three houses grant favors to the government or its most devoted supporters; the government departments are on the best of terms with those lynxes of the bank, and they know all Paris. There's no reason why Tiphaine should not get to be president of some royal court. Marry Rogron; we'll make him Deputy for Provins when I have won over some other constituency in Seine-et-Marne for myself. Then you shall have a receiver-generalship, one of the places where Rogron won't have to do anything but sign his name. We shall be with the opposition if it triumphs; but, if the Bourbons win, why, then we will incline, oh! so gently toward the Centre! At all events, Rogron won't live forever, and later you can marry a man with a title. Attain a good position and the Chargebœufs will take you up. Your poverty doubtless, like mine, has given you an accurate idea of what men are worth; we must make use of them as we make use of post horses. A man or a woman draws us from one post to another."

Vinet had made of Bathilde a Catherine de' Medici on a small scale. He left his wife at home, happy with her two children, and always accompanied Mesdames de Chargebœuf to the Rogrons'. He arrived in all the glory of the tribune of Champagne. He wore at this time handsome gold-bowed spectacles, a silk waistcoat, white cravat, black breeches, fine boots, and a black coat made in Paris, together with a gold watch and chain. Instead of the old Vinet, pale and thin, irritable and frowning, the present Vinet had all the exterior aspect of a politician; sure of his fortune, he walked with the assurance characteristic of the lawyer who knows all the devious by-paths of the law. His shrewd little head was so well combed, his clean-shaven face gave him such a mincing, though unresponsive expression, that he seemed an agreeable sort of man of the Robespierre type. Certainly he would make a fine procureur-général, with his elastic, dangerous, deadly eloquence, or an orator of a finesse worthy of Benjamin Constant. The sourness and hatred of his fellows, that formerly guided his actions, had changed to a deceitful gentleness. The poison had changed to medicine.

"Good-evening, my dear, how d'ye do?" said Madame de Chargebœuf to Sylvie.

Bathilde went straight to the fireplace, removed her hat, glanced at herself in the glass, and placed her pretty foot on the fender bar to exhibit it to Rogron.

"What's the matter, monsieur?" she said, glancing at him, "you don't salute me? Indeed! when I put on velvet dresses for you—"

She passed Pierrette to go and lay her hat upon a chair, but the girl took it from her hands, and she allowed her to do it, just as if she were a lady's maid. Men are supposed to be very savage, and so are tigers; but neither tigers, nor vipers, nor diplomatists, nor officers of the law, nor executioners, nor kings, in their most atrocious acts, can approach the suave cruelty, the poisoned sweetness, the savage scorn of young women toward their sex, when some deem themselves superior to others in birth, in fortune, in attractiveness, and when there is a question of marriage, of precedence, or of any of the innumerable matters in which women are rivals.

The "Thanks, mademoiselle," which Bathilde said to Pierrette, was a poem in twelve stanzas.

Her name was Bathilde and the other's Pierrette. She was a Chargebœuf and the other a Lorrain! Pierrette was small and ill, Bathilde was tall and overflowing with health! Pierrette was supported by charity, Bathilde and her mother had means of their own! Pierrette wore a stuff dress with a *guimpe*, Bathilde made the folds of her blue velvet dress undulate. Bathilde had the finest shoulders in the department, the arms of a queen; Pierrette's shoulder-blades were visible and her arms were thin! Pierrette was Cinderella, Bathilde was the fairy! Bathilde was about to marry, Pierrette would die unmarried! Bathilde was adored, no one cared for Pierrette! Bathilde had a fascinating headdress, her taste was excellent; Pierrette concealed her hair beneath a little cap and knew nothing of fashion! Epilogue: Bathilde was everything, Pierrette was nothing. The proud Breton maiden fully understood this ghastly poem.

"Good-evening, little one," said Madame de Chargebœuf, from the summit of her grandeur, and in the tone which her nose, pinched at the end, gave to her voice.

Vinet capped the climax of this species of insult by gazing at Pierrette and saying in three different tones:

"Oh! oh! oh! how lovely we are to-night, Pierrette!"

"Lovely?" said the poor child. "You ought to say that to your cousin, not to me."

"Oh! my cousin is always lovely," the advocate replied. "Isn't she, Père Rogron?" he added, turning to the master of the house and patting his hand.

"Yes," was Rogron's reply.

"Why make him say what he doesn't think? He has never found me to his liking," said Bathilde, standing in front of Rogron. "Isn't that true? Look at me."

Rogron looked at her from head to foot, and closed his eyes softly as a cat does when you scratch her head.

"You are too lovely," he said, "too dangerous to look at."

"Why?"

Rogron gazed at the fire and said nothing. At that moment Mademoiselle Habert entered the room followed by the colonel. Céleste Habert had become a sort of common enemy, and could count only Sylvie upon her side; but everyone showed her the more deference and courtesy and amiable attentions, because everyone was trying to undermine her influence, so that she stood between these evidences of friendship and the distrust her brother kept alive within her. The vicar, although far from the theatre of war, understood everything that was going on. And so, when he realized that his sister's hopes were dead, he became one of the most terrible antagonists of the Rogrons. Everyone can picture Mademoiselle Habert instantly, by realizing that even had she not been the mistress and arch-mistress of a boarding-school, she would still have had the appearance of a schoolmistress. Schoolmistresses have a way of their own of putting on their caps. Just as elderly Englishwomen have obtained a monopoly in turbans, schoolmistresses have a monopoly in this sort of cap. The framework dominates the flowers, the flowers are more than artificial; as they are always kept a long while in a wardrobe, these caps are always new and always old, even on the first day. These women make it a point of honor to copy a painter's mannikin; they sit on their hips, not on their chair. When you speak to them they turn their whole body, instead of turning only their head; and, when their dresses squeak, you are tempted to believe that the springs of the automaton are out of order. Mademoiselle Habert, the perfect type of this species, had the stern eye and the duenna's mouth, and beneath her wrinkled chin the limp and soiled ribbons of her cap flapped this way and that as she moved. She had a little embellishment in the shape of two moles, rather large and rather dark, well supplied with hairs, which she allowed to grow like wild clematis. Lastly, she took snuff, and took it most ungracefully.

They set to work at the game of boston. Sylvie had Mademoiselle Habert opposite her, and the colonel at her side, facing Madame de Chargebœuf. Bathilde sat between her mother and Rogron. Sylvie placed Pierrette between herself and the colonel. Rogron prepared another table, in case Messieurs Néraud and Cournant, and the latter's wife, should come. Vinet and Bathilde knew how to play whist, which Monsieur and Madame Cournant also liked to play. Since the Dames de Chargebœuf, as they were called in Provins, had been in the habit of coming to the Rogrons', the two lamps shone on the mantel-piece between the candelabra and the clock, and the tables were lighted by wax candles at forty sous a pound, paid for with the gains of the cards.

"Well, Pierrette, take your work, my child," said Sylvie with treacherous sweetness, when she saw her cousin watching the colonel's game.

She always affected to treat Pierrette very kindly in public. This base deceit irritated the straightforward child of Bretagne, and made her despise her cousin. Pierrette took her embroidery; but, as she kept her needle moving, she continued to look over Gouraud's hand. Gouraud did not act as if he knew that he had a little girl beside him. Sylvie watched him closely and began to look upon his indifference as extremely suspicious. There was one time during the evening when the old maid undertook a *grande misère* in hearts, the basket being full of counters amounting to more than twenty-seven sous. The Cournants and Néraud had arrived. The old magistrate Desfondrilles, in whom the Ministry of Justice must have discovered some judicial capacity, as they entrusted him with the functions of examining magistrate, but whose talent always failed when it came to being a judge proper, and who had deserted the Tiphaine party and joined the Vinet party some two months before, was standing in front of the mantel, with his back to the fire and his coat-tails raised. He was looking about the salon, in which Mademoiselle de Chargebœuf shone resplendent, for it seemed as if the red decorations were designed for the express purpose of showing off the charms of that fascinating person. Silence reigned; Pierrette was watching the *misère* and Sylvie's attention was diverted from her by the excitement of the play.

"Play that," said Pierrette to the colonel, pointing to a heart.

The colonel started on a sequence of hearts; the hearts lay between Sylvie and him; he captured the ace, although Sylvie had five small cards to guard it."

"It wasn't fair play, Pierrette saw my hand, and the colonel took her advice."

"But, mademoiselle," said Céleste, "it was the colonel's play to continue the hearts suit when he found that you had them."

This expression made Monsieur Desfondrilles smile; a shrewd man he was and he found entertainment in watching all the different interests at work in Provins, where he played the part of Rigaudin in Picard's *Maison en Loterie.*

"It's the colonel's play," said Cournant, who had no idea what they were talking about.

Sylvie darted at Mademoiselle Habert one of the fierce and catlike glances that old maids bestow upon each other.

"Pierrette, you saw my hand," she said, fixing her eyes upon her cousin.

"No, cousin."

"I was looking at you all," said the archæologist, "and I can certify that the little one looked at nobody's hand but the colonel's."

"Nonsense! little girls have a way of casting sweet glances," said Gouraud alarmed.

"Ah!" exclaimed Sylvie.

"Yes," Gouraud went on, "she may very well have looked at your hand to play a trick on you. Eh, my little beauty?"

"No," said the straightforward Bretonne, "I am not capable of doing such a thing, and if I had looked into my cousin's hand I should have helped her."

"You know you're a liar, and, more than that, a little fool," said Sylvie. "How can anyone put the slightest faith in your words after what happened this morning? You're a—"

Pierrette did not allow her cousin to finish in her hearing what she was going to say. Foreseeing a torrent of insults, she rose, left the room and went up to her own chamber without a light. Sylvie turned white with rage and muttered between her teeth:

"She shall pay for this."

"Do you propose to pay for the *misère?*" said Madame de Chargebœuf.

At that moment poor Pierrette knocked her head against the hall door, which the magistrate had left open.

"Good! I'm glad of it!" cried Sylvie.

"What has happened to her?" inquired Desfondrilles.

"Nothing more than she deserves," Sylvie replied.

"She got a hard blow," said Mademoiselle Habert.

Sylvie tried to evade paying her losses on the *misère* by starting to go to see what Pierrette had done, but Madame de Chargebœuf stopped her.

"Pay us first," she said smiling, "for you won't remember to do it when you come back."

This remark, based upon the ex-haberdasher's bad faith in the matter of her gambling debts, and the tricks to which she resorted to evade them, met with general approval. Sylvie sat down and thought no more about Pierrette, nor did her indifference surprise any of her guests. Throughout the evening Sylvie was lost in thought. When the game was at an end, about half-past nine, she buried herself in a couch by the fireplace, and did not rise except to receive her guests' parting salutations. The colonel was putting her to the torture and she no longer knew what to think of him.

"Men are so false!" she said to herself as she fell asleep.

Pierrette had given herself a terrible blow against the edge of the door, which she struck with her head just at the level of the ear, at the point where the young girls separate from the rest the part of their hair that they put in curl-papers. The next morning there was a great black and blue spot there.

"God punished you," said her cousin at breakfast; "you disobeyed me and did not pay me the respect you owe me, when you refused to listen and went out of the room in the middle of my sentence; you got just what you deserve."

"However," said Rogron, "you ought to put a compress of salt and water on the bruise."

"Nonsense! it won't amount to anything, cousin," said Pierrette.

The poor child had reached a point where even such remarks as this of her guardian's seemed a proof of affection.

The week ended as it began, in constant torment. Sylvie developed a fiendish ingenuity and her tyranny invented the most savage refinements of cruelty. The Illinois, the Cherokees, the Mohicans, might have taken lessons from her. Pierrette did not dare complain of the ill-defined but severe pains she felt in her head. The source of her cousin's dissatisfaction was her taciturnity concerning Brigaut, and with true Breton obstinacy Pierrette maintained a perfectly comprehensible silence.

Every one will understand now, the meaning of the glance the child cast upon Brigaut, who, she thought, would be lost to her if discovered, and whom she instinctively wished to have near at hand, and so was overjoyed to know that he was in Provins. What bliss it was to her to see him once more! The sight of the companion of her childhood may be compared to the longing gaze that the exile casts from afar upon his native country, to the martyr's glance upward to Heaven, which his eyes, endowed with second sight, have the power to penetrate during the agony of the torture.

Pierrette's last glance was so thoroughly understood by the major's son, that, as he planed his boards, wielded his compass, took his measurements and fitted his timbers together, he cudgeled his brains to invent a method of corresponding with her. He finally hit upon this exceedingly simple scheme.

At a certain hour in the night, Pierrette could drop a string to which he would fasten a letter. Amid the terrible suffering caused by her twofold disease—an abscess was forming in her head, in addition to the general derangement of her constitution—she was sustained by the thought of corresponding with Brigaut. The same desire stirred both their hearts; though parted, they understood each other! At every blow she received in her heart, at every throbbing pain in her head, Pierrette said to herself: "Brigaut is here!" And that thought enabled her to suffer without complaint.

On the first market-day following their first meeting at the church, Brigaut watched for his little friend. Although he saw that she was as pale and trembling as a leaf about to fall from its twig in November, he did not lose his head, but bought some fruit of the dealer with whom the formidable Sylvie was haggling over the price of provisions. Brigaut saw an opportunity to slip a note into Pierrette's hand, and Brigaut did so, in the most natural way, joking the woman about her wares, all with the self-possession of a *roué*, as if he had never done anything else all his life, he was so cool about it, despite the hot blood that was buzzing in his ears, and came boiling from his heart as if it would burst the veins and arteries. Externally he was as determined as an old galley-slave, but trembled within with the excitement of innocence, precisely like some mothers in their moments of mortal agony, when they are caught between two perils, between two precipices. Pierrette shared Brigaut's dizziness; she put the paper in the pocket of her apron. The bright spots on her cheek-bones turned to the cherry red of a blazing fire. The two children, unknown to themselves, were assailed by more emotions than go to make up ten ordinary love affairs. That moment left in their hearts an inexhaustible well-spring of emotion. Sylvie, who was unacquainted with the Breton accent, could not detect a lover in Brigaut, and Pierrette returned home with her treasure.

The letters of these two poor children were destined to figure as exhibits in a ghastly legal conflict; otherwise, they would never have seen the light. This is what Pierrette read that evening in her bedroom:

"MY DEAR PIERRETTE,

"Every night at midnight—when everyone else is asleep, but I shall be awake for your sake—I will be under your kitchen window. You can let down from your window a string long enough to reach me; it will make very little noise and you can fasten to it what you have written to me. I will answer in the same way. I have found out that *they* have taught you to read and write—I mean the miserable creatures who ought to have been so kind to you and have been so cruel! That you, Pierrette, the daughter of a colonel who died for France, should be forced by those monsters to do their cooking! That's where your lovely color and your splendid health have gone! What has become of my Pierrette? what have they done with her? I see plainly enough that you are not happy. Oh! Pierrette, let us go back to Bretagne! I can earn enough to give you all you need; you can have three francs a day; for I earn from four to five, and thirty sous is enough for me. Ah! Pierrette, how I have prayed to the good Lord for you since I have seen you again! I have begged Him to give me all your suffering, and to let you have all the pleasures of life. What do you do for them that they keep you? Your grandmother is better than they. These Rogrons are poisonous creatures, they have taken away all your cheerfulness. You don't walk at Provins as you used to walk in Bretagne. Let us go back to Bretagne! At all events I am here to help you, to follow your orders, and you must tell me what you want. If you need money, I have sixty crowns of ours, and I shall have the sorrowful pleasure of sending them to you by the string, instead of kissing your dear hand respectfully as I put them in it. Ah! my poor Pierrette, the blue sky has seemed dark to me for a long while. I haven't had two happy hours since I put you in that wretched diligence; and when I saw you again, like a ghost, that witch of a cousin of yours interrupted our gladness. However, we shall have the comfort of praying together every Sunday, and perhaps God will listen to us better so. I do not say adieu, dear Pierrette, but until to-night."

This letter moved Pierrette so deeply that she sat for more than an hour, reading it over and over and gazing at it; but she reflected, not without a pang, that she had nothing to write with. However, she undertook the hazardous journey from her attic to the dining-room, where she could find pens and ink and paper, and she succeeded in accomplishing it without waking her terrible cousin. A few moments before midnight she finished this letter, which was also put in evidence at the trial.

"My dear, yes, my dear, for you and my grandmother, Jacques, are the only ones who love me. May God forgive me, but you are also the only two people on earth I love, one just as much as the other, no more nor less. I was too small to know my little mamma, but you and my grandmother, Jacques, and my grandfather too—may God rest his soul! for he suffered bitterly on account of the loss of his money, which was my loss too—you two, who are left, I love as much as I am miserable! To know how much I love you, you must know how much I suffer; and I don't want that, for it would make you too unhappy. They talk to me as we wouldn't talk to a dog! they treat me like the lowest of the low! and no matter how closely I question myself, as if I were before God, I can't find that I have done them any wrong. Before you sang the bride's song to me, I recognized God's mercy in my suffering; for I was praying to Him to take me from the world, and when I felt very ill I would say to myself: 'God hears me!' But, since you are here, Brigaut, I want to go back with you to Bretagne, to my grandmother who loves me, although they say she stole eight thousand francs from me. Can it be that I have eight thousand francs, Brigaut? If they are mine, can't you get them? But it's all a lie; if we had eight thousand francs my grandmother wouldn't be at Saint-Jacques. I didn't want to disturb her last days, the dear, good woman, by the story of my sufferings; it might kill her. Ah! if she knew that they made her granddaughter wash the dishes—she who used to say to me: 'Let that alone, dearie,' when I tried to help her in her sufferings: 'let it alone, let it alone, dear, you'll spoil your pretty little hands.' Ah! you should see my nails now! Most of the time I can hardly carry the provision basket, it cuts into my arms so, coming home from market. And yet I don't think my cousins are unkind; but it's their way to be always scolding, and it seems I can't leave them. My cousin is my guardian. One day when I thought of running away because I felt so wretched, and I told them I was going, Cousin Sylvie told me the gendarmes would go after me, and that the law was on my guardian's side, and then I saw that cousins no more take the place of father and mother than the saints take the place of God. What do you suppose I could do with your money, my poor Jacques? Keep it for our journey. Oh! how much I think of you and Pen-Hoël and the big pond! That's where we first ate our white bread together. It seems to me I am growing worse. I am very sick, Jacques! I have pains in my head to make a poor girl shriek, and in my bones and my back, and something in my loins that is killing me; and I don't have any appetite except for wretched things like roots and leaves; and I love the smell of printed paper. There are times when I would weep if I were alone; but they don't let me do anything I want to, and I haven't even leave to weep. I have to hide myself in order to offer my tears to Him from whom we receive those favors which we call our afflictions. Wasn't it He who gave you the idea of singing the bride's song under my window? Oh! Jacques, my cousin heard you and told me I had a lover. If you will be my lover, love me dearly; I promise to love you always as in the past, and to be your faithful servant.

"PIERRETTE LORRAIN."

"You will always love me, won't you?"

The girl had taken from the kitchen a piece of bread to weight the string, and in this she made a hole, in which she put the letter. At midnight, having opened her window with extreme care, she let down her letter and the bread, which could make no noise striking against the house or the blinds. She felt Brigaut pull the string and break it, after which he stole away. When he was in the centre of the square, she could see him indistinctly in the starlight; but he saw her in the luminous zone of the light thrown by her candle. The two children remained thus for an hour; Pierrette would motion to him to go away and he would start, but, seeing that she remained at the window, he would return to his post, only to be bidden anew to leave the square. This performance was repeated several times before the girl closed her window, blew out her light and went to bed. Once in bed, she fell asleep and slept happily, although she was in pain; she had Brigaut's letter under her pillow. She slept as the persecuted sleep, a sleep gladdened by angels, in an atmosphere of gold and heavenly blue, full of the divine arabesques that Raphael had glimpses of and copied.

Pierrette's moral nature had so much influence upon her delicate physical nature, that she rose the next morning as joyous and light of heart as a skylark, radiant and full of life. Such a transformation could not escape the notice of her cousin, who, instead of scolding her, began to watch her with the close attention of a magpie. "Why is she so happy?" was a question inspired by jealousy, not by tyranny. If Sylvie's mind had not been full of the colonel, she would have said to Pierrette, as on other occasions: "Pierrette, you're very impudent, or very heedless of what people say to you." But the old maid determined to spy upon Pierrette, as old maids know how to spy. The day was as still and threatening as the moment before the bursting of a storm.

"So you're not sick any more, mademoiselle?" said Sylvie at dinner.—"Didn't I tell you she did it all just to annoy us?" she cried, addressing her brother, without awaiting Pierrette's reply.

"On the contrary, mademoiselle, I am feverish—"

"What kind of fever? You're as gay as a lark. Perhaps you dreamed about somebody?"

Pierrette shivered and looked down at her plate.

"Tartufe!" cried Sylvie. "At fourteen years of age! already! what a disposition! But you're unfortunate, eh?"

"I don't know what you mean," said Pierrette, raising her lovely luminous brown eyes to her cousin's face.

"This evening you will stay in the dining-room with a candle, and work. You're in the way in the salon, and I don't propose to have you looking into my hand and then telling your favorites what to play."

Pierrette did not move a muscle.

"Sly minx!" cried Sylvie, leaving the room.

Rogron, who could make nothing of his sister's words, said to Pierrette:

"What is there between you two? Try to please your cousin, Pierrette; she is very kind and indulgent, and if you make her angry, you certainly must be to blame. Why are you always fighting? For my part, I like to live a quiet life. Look at Mademoiselle Bathilde; you ought to take her as your model."

Pierrette could endure anything, for Brigaut would surely come at midnight to bring her an answer to her letter; that hope was what she fed on all that day. At last the clock struck twelve and she opened her window gently, using a cord which she had made for herself by tying several pieces of thread together. She heard Brigaut's footsteps, and when she had pulled up her cord, she found the following letter, which filled her heart with joy:

"MY DEAR PIERRETTE,

"If you are so ill you must not tire yourself out waiting for me. You will hear me make the signal the *chuins*—Chouans—used to use. Luckily my father taught me to imitate their cry. I will give it three times, then you will know that I am under the window, and you can let down the cord; but I shall not come again for some days. I hope then to have good news for you. Oh! Pierrette, you can't really mean that you think of death! My whole heart shivered at the thought; it seemed as if I were dead myself. No, Pierrette, you shall not die, you shall live and be happy, and you will soon be free from your persecutors. If I do not succeed in what I am now undertaking to rescue you, I shall go to the authorities and declare in the face of heaven and earth how your unworthy relatives are treating you. I am sure that you have only a few days more to suffer! be patient, Pierrette! Brigaut is watching over you as in the days when we used to go sliding on the pond, and when I pulled you out of the great hole in which we came near drowning together. Adieu! my dear Pierrette; in a few days we shall be happy, God willing. Alas! I do not dare tell you of the only thing that could interfere with our reunion. But God loves us! And so in a few days I shall be able to see my dear Pierrette at liberty, free from care, with no one to prevent me from looking at her: for I am hungry to see you, O Pierrette! Pierrette, who deigns to love me and to tell me so. Yes, Pierrette, I will be your lover, but only when I have earned the fortune you deserve; until then I will be only your devoted slave, with whose life you can do what you will. Adieu.

"JACQUES BRIGAUT."

The fact that Major Brigaut's son did not disclose to Pierrette was this: he had written the following letter to Madame Lorrain at Nantes:

"Madame Lorrain, your granddaughter will die, worn out by cruel treatment, if you do not demand her return to you; I had difficulty in recognizing her, and to enable you to judge of the condition of affairs for yourself, I enclose with this the letter I received from Pierrette. You are supposed here to have taken your granddaughter's fortune, and you ought to clear yourself from that charge. If you can, come quickly; we may still be happy, but if you delay, you will find Pierrette dead.

"I am, with respect, your obedient servant,

"JACQUES BRIGAUT.

"Care of Monsieur Frappier, carpenter, Grand' Rue, Provins."

Brigaut was afraid that Pierrette's grandmother was dead.

*

Although the letter from the man whom, in her innocence, she called her lover, was almost an enigma to Pierrette, she believed in him with all her virgin faith. Her heart had the feeling that travelers in the desert feel when they see from afar the clump of palm trees about a spring. In a few days her woes would be at an end, for Brigaut told her so; she slept upon the promise of her old playfellow; and yet, when she put that letter with the other, she had a horrifying thought which she expressed in horrifying words:

"Poor Brigaut," she said to herself, "he doesn't know what a hole I have put my foot into!"

Sylvie had heard Pierrette moving about and she had also heard Brigaut under her window; she jumped out of bed, rushed to the window, looked out through the blinds and saw, by the light of the moon, a man walking away toward the house in which the colonel lived, and opposite which he stood still. The old maid opened her door softly, crept upstairs and was stupefied to see a light in Pierrette's room. She looked through the keyhole, but could see nothing.

"Are you sick, Pierrette?" she asked.

"No, cousin," Pierrette replied, in amazement.

"Why do you have a light at midnight, then? Open the door. I want to know what you're doing."

Pierrette came to the door, barefooted, and her cousin saw the cord lying in a heap, for Pierrette, not anticipating a surprise, had not taken the precaution to conceal it. Sylvie pounced upon it.

"What do you use this for?" she said.

"Nothing, cousin."

"Nothing?" she retorted. "Ah! lying still. You won't get to paradise at this rate. Go back to bed; you are cold."

She asked no further questions and withdrew, leaving Pierrette alarmed beyond measure by her clemency. Instead of making an outcry over the matter, Sylvie had determined to take the colonel and Pierrette by surprise, to seize their letters and bring confusion upon the lovers who were seeking to deceive her. Pierrette, inspired by her danger, sewed her two letters on the inside of her corsets and covered them with calico.

At this point, the love affairs of Brigaut and Pierrette came to an end.

Pierrette was much pleased with her friend's decision, for her cousin's suspicions would be allayed, having nothing to feed upon. Indeed, Sylvie passed three nights without sleep, and three evenings watching the innocent colonel, without detecting anything in Pierrette's behavior, or within or without the house, that indicated an understanding between them. She sent Pierrette to confession and seized the opportunity to search everything in the child's room, with the skill and persistence of spies and custom-house clerks at the Paris barriers. She found nothing. Her rage attained the highest point that it is possible for human emotion to attain. If Pierrette had been at hand, she certainly would have beaten her without pity. To a woman of her temperament, jealousy was not so much a sentiment as an occupation; she was all alive, she felt her heart beat, she experienced emotions hitherto entirely unknown to her; the slightest sound kept her awake, she heard the least rustle, she watched Pierrette with threatening attention.

"The little wretch will be the death of me!" she said.

Sylvie's harsh treatment of her cousin reached a point at which it became the most refined cruelty, and greatly aggravated Pierrette's deplorable condition. The poor child was in a constant fever and the pains in her head became intolerable. In a week's time, she presented to the habitués of the Rogron salon a face drawn by suffering, which would certainly have touched hearts less absorbed by selfish interests; but Doctor Néraud, acting upon a hint from Vinet, it may be, did not come to the house for more than a week. The colonel, being an object of suspicion to Sylvie, was afraid of defeating his nuptial schemes if he showed the slightest interest in Pierrette. Bathilde explained the change in the child by attributing it to a physical derangement, natural at her age, and entirely without danger.

At last, one Sunday evening, when Pierrette was in the salon, which was full of company, she could not bear the agonizing pain and fainted away; the colonel, who was the first to discover her condition, went to her and carried her to one of the sofas.

"She did it on purpose," said Sylvie, glancing at Mademoiselle Habert and those who were playing with her.

"I assure you that your cousin is very ill," said the colonel.

"She was very comfortable in your arms," retorted Sylvie with a fiendish smile.

"The colonel is right," said Madame de Chargebœuf, "you ought to send for a doctor. After church this morning, everybody was talking about Mademoiselle Lorrain's condition, which is very perceptible."

"I am dying," moaned Pierrette.

Desfondrilles called Sylvie and bade her loosen her cousin's dress. Sylvie hurried to her, saying:

"It's all a sham!"

She unbuttoned the dress; she was about to unfasten the corsets but Pierrette summoned all her strength, stood up and cried:

"No! no! I will go to bed."

Sylvie had felt the papers under the corsets. She allowed Pierrette to make her escape, and said, so that everybody could hear:

"Well, what do you say to her sickness now? it's all a pretence! You'd never guess what a wicked child she is!"

When the party broke up, she detained Vinet; she was in a frenzy of rage, she was determined to be revenged; she was almost insulting to the colonel when he bade her good-night. The colonel darted at Vinet a threatening glance that pierced his very entrails and seemed to leave a bullet there. Sylvie requested Vinet to remain. When they were alone she said to him:

"Never, so long as I live, will I marry the colonel!"

"Now that you have made up your mind to that, I can venture to speak. The colonel is my friend, but I am more your friend than his: Rogron has rendered me services that I shall never forget. I am as staunch a friend as an implacable enemy. When I am once in the Chamber, you will see how high I will rise, and Rogron shall be receiver-general, if I can make him so.—Now, swear that you will never repeat a word of our conversation!"

Sylvie nodded.

"In the first place, this worthy colonel is an inveterate gambler."

"Aha!" said Sylvie.

"Except for the straits to which that passion reduced him, he might have been a marshal of France perhaps," the advocate continued. "You can see that he would devour your fortune! but he's a deep one. Don't you believe that a man and wife have children or not as they please: God sends children, and you know what would happen to you. No, if you want to marry, wait till I'm in the Chamber, and then you can marry old Desfondrilles, who will be president of the tribunal. By way of revenge, marry your brother to Mademoiselle de Chargebœuf;

I will undertake to obtain her consent. She will have two thousand francs a year, and then you will be connected with the Chargebœufs, as I am. Believe me, the Chargebœufs will acknowledge us as cousins some day."

"Gouraud loves Pierrette," was Sylvie's reply.

"He is quite capable of it," said Vinet, "and capable of marrying her after your death."

"A very pretty little scheme," said she.

"As I told you, he's as crafty as the devil! Marry your brother off, and let it be known that you propose to remain unmarried in order to leave your property to your nephews or nieces; in that way, you will reach Pierrette and Gouraud at a single stroke, and you will see how he'll treat you then."

"True," cried the old maid, "I have them. She shall go into a shop and she shall have nothing. She hasn't a sou; let her do as we did, work for her living."

Vinet took his leave after making his plan thoroughly clear to Sylvie, whose obstinacy was well known to him. The old maid would surely end by believing that the plan was her own. Vinet found the colonel smoking a cigar on the square, waiting for him to come out.

"Beware!" said Gouraud. "You have demolished me, but there are enough stones in the ruins to bury you."

"Colonel!"

"Never mind about the colonel; I'll make you pay for this; in the first place, you shall never be chosen deputy—"

"Colonel!"

"I control ten votes and the election depends on—"

"Listen to me, colonel, then! Isn't there any woman in the world but old Sylvie? I have just been trying to set you right: you are accused and convicted of writing to Pierrette; she has seen you leave your house at midnight to come under her window—"

"Well thought of!"

"She's going to marry her brother to Bathilde, and leave her money to their children."

"Will Rogron have children?"

"Yes," said Vinet. "But I promise to find you an agreeable young woman with a hundred and fifty thousand francs. Are you mad? can we afford to have trouble? Things have turned against you, in spite of all I could do; but you don't know me."

"Well, we must have an understanding," rejoined the colonel. "Find a woman with fifty thousand crowns for me, before the election; if not, don't reckon on me. I don't like greedy bedfellows, and you've pulled all the clothes over on your side. Good-night."

"You will see," said Vinet, pressing the colonel's hand affectionately.

About one o'clock in the morning, the note of a screech-owl, wonderfully well imitated, rang out three times, loud and clear, upon the square. Pierrette heard it in her feverish sleep; she rose, wet with perspiration, opened her window, saw Brigaut, and tossed him a spool of silk to which he fastened a letter. Sylvie, excited by the occurrences of the evening and by her irresolution, was not asleep; she heard the screech-owl.

"Ah! the bird of evil omen! But what's this! Pierrette is getting up! What's the matter with her?"

When she heard the attic window open, Sylvie rushed to her window and heard Brigaut's letter rustling along the blinds. She tightened the strings of her nightgown and went upstairs, where she found Pierrette disentangling the silk and untying the letter.

"Ah! I've caught you now," cried the old maid, running to the window, from which she saw Brigaut, running off at full speed. "Give me that letter."

"No, cousin," said Pierrette; and with one of those mighty inspirations of which youth is capable, sustained by her strong heart, she rose to the occasion and exhibited the grandeur of resistance which we admire in the history of some nations when driven to despair.

"Ah! you won't?" cried Sylvie, advancing upon her cousin, with a horrible expression of hatred on her face and fairly gnashing her teeth with rage.

Pierrette recoiled in order to grasp her letter firmly in her hand, which she held clenched with invincible strength. Sylvie thereupon seized the delicate white hand in her lobster claws and tried to open it. It was a terrible, repellent struggle, like every attack upon thought, the only treasure that God places beyond all human power and retains as a secret bond between unhappy mortals and himself. The two women, one dying, the other as strong as an ox, gazed fixedly at each other. Pierrette's eyes darted at her executioner the flashing glance of the templar receiving on his breast the blows of the terrible engine of torture, in the presence of Philippe le Bel, who could not endure the withering gleam and left the place of execution trembling with horror. Sylvie, a woman, and a jealous woman, answered the magnetic glance with baleful lightning flashes. Deathlike silence reigned. The Breton girl's tightly closed fingers resisted her cousin's attempts as if they were made of steel. Sylvie wrung her arm and tried to force the fingers open; and, finding all her efforts fruitless, she wantonly buried her nails in the flesh. At last, frantic with rage, she put Pierrette's hand to her teeth, to try and bite the fingers and conquer her by pain. Pierrette still defied her with the crushing glance of innocence. The old maid's frenzy at last increased to such a point that she lost control of herself; she took Pierrette's arm and began to beat the fist against the window-sill, against the marble mantel-shelf, as one cracks nuts to get at the fruit inside.

"Help! help!" cried Pierrette, "they are killing me!"

"Aha! you shriek, do you, when I catch you with a lover in the middle of the night?—"

And she beat her mercilessly.

"Help!" cried Pierrette, whose hand was all covered with blood.

At that moment there was a violent knocking at the front door. Both cousins, being equally weary, suspended hostilities.

Rogron, awakened by the noise, uneasily wondering what had happened, ran to his sister's room and did not find her; he was alarmed at that, went down and opened the door, and was almost knocked over by Brigaut, who rushed in, followed by a sort of phantom. At that moment Sylvie's eyes fell upon Pierrette's corsets; she remembered that she had felt papers upon them and she pounced on them like a tiger on its prey, wound them about her hands and exhibited them with the fiendish smile of an Iroquois before scalping his foe.

"Oh! I am dying," said Pierrette, falling on her knees. "Who will save me?"

"I!" cried a white-haired woman, entering the room, and presenting to Pierrette's wondering eyes a face of the color of old parchment, in which gleamed two gray eyes.

"Ah! grandmother, you come too late," cried the poor child, bursting into tears.

She fell upon her bed, her strength entirely exhausted, a prey to the prostration that always follows so violent a struggle on the part of an invalid. The tall, gaunt phantom took Pierrette in her arms as a nursemaid would take a child, and went out with Brigaut, without a word to Sylvie, but with a majestic glance at her of tragic, denunciatory significance. The apparition of this august old lady, in her Breton costume, with her head enveloped in the national headdress, which is a sort of pelisse of black cloth, and accompanied by the terrible Brigaut, frightened Sylvie: she thought that she had seen Death. She went downstairs, heard the door close, and found herself face to face with her brother, who said to her:

"So they didn't kill you, eh?"

"Go to bed," said Sylvie. "To-morrow morning we will see what we are to do."

She went back to bed, cut open the corsets, and read Brigaut's two letters, which confounded her. She fell asleep in the direst perplexity, but with no suspicion of the terrible results her conduct was destined to produce.

The letters sent by Brigaut to the widow Lorrain found her in a state of ineffable happiness, which was sadly marred by the perusal of them. The poor old septuagenarian had nearly died of grief because she was obliged to live without Pierrette; she consoled herself for having lost her by the thought that she had sacrificed herself to her granddaughter's interests. Hers was one of the hearts that never grow old and are sustained and vivified by the idea of self-sacrifice. Her old husband, whose granddaughter was his only joy, had sighed for Pierrette; every day that he lived he looked about as if in search of her. It was an old man's grief, of the sort upon which old men live and of which they finally die. Every one can imagine, therefore, the joy that filled the heart of that poor old woman, an inmate of a charitable institution, when she learned of one of those infrequent actions, which are sometimes performed in France.

After his disastrous failure, François-Joseph Collinet, head of the house of Collinet, had gone to America with his children. He had too noble a heart to remain at Nantes, ruined, without credit, amid the misery his failure had caused. Between 1814 and 1824, this courageous merchant, assisted by his children and his cashier, who remained faithful to him and furnished the money with which to begin anew, built up another fortune. After incredible toil, crowned by success, he returned to Nantes, during the eleventh year, to rehabilitate himself, leaving his oldest son at the head of his transatlantic house. He found Madame Lorrain of Pen-Hoël at Saint-Jacques, and observed the resignation with which the most unfortunate of all his victims endured her poverty.

"May God forgive you!" said the old woman; "for you give me, on the brink of the grave, the means of assuring my granddaughter's welfare; but I can never rehabilitate my poor husband!"

Monsieur Collinet paid his creditor the principal of his indebtedness, with interest at the legal rate, in all about forty-two thousand francs. His other creditors, mostly energetic, shrewd, wealthy business men, had weathered the blow; whereas the disaster to the Lorrains seemed irreparable to old

Collinet, who promised the widow to clear her husband's memory by the payment of forty thousand francs more. When the Bourse at Nantes was informed of this generous conduct, they voted to restore Collinet to membership before the issue of the decree of the royal court of Rennes; but the old merchant declined that honor, and complied with all the rigorous provisions of the Commercial Code. Madame Lorrain, as it happened, had received her forty-two thousand francs the day before that on which the post brought her Brigaut's letters. When she signed the acquittance, her first words were:

"Now I can live with my Pierrette and marry her to poor Brigaut, who will make his fortune with my money!"

She could not sit still; she moved restlessly about and wanted to start for Provins at once. And so, when she read the fatal letter, she rushed into the town like a madwoman, seeking information as to the best way to go to Provins with the rapidity of lightning. She took the mailcoach, when the celerity of movement of that government conveyance was explained to her. At Paris she took the Troyes coach, and arrived at half-past eleven at Frappier's house; and there, Brigaut, at sight of the old Breton woman's black despair, described Pierrette's condition to her in a few words, and promised to take her to her at once. These few words so horrified the grandmother that she could not restrain her impatience and rushed out into the square. When Pierrette shrieked, the old woman's heart was no less deeply wounded than Brigaut's. Between them, they would undoubtedly have aroused the town, had not Rogron admitted them. That shriek of a young girl driven to extremities suddenly endowed the grandmother with physical strength equal to the terror it caused her; she carried her dear Pierrette in her arms to Frappier's house, where Madame Frappier had hastily arranged Brigaut's room for the grandmother's accommodation. The sick girl was laid upon a bed, just made, in that humble apartment; and there she fainted, still holding her hand tightly closed, mangled and bleeding as it was, with the nails buried in the flesh. Frappier, his wife, Brigaut and the old Bretonne gazed at the child in silence, one and all overcome by inexpressible amazement.

"Why is her hand all bloody?" were the grandmother's first words.

Pierrette, overcome by the sleep that follows a tremendous exertion of strength, and realizing instinctively that she was in no danger of further violence, relaxed her fingers. Brigaut's letter appeared as if in reply to the question.

"They tried to take my letter from her," said Brigaut, falling on his knees and picking up the few lines he had written to tell his dear friend to leave the Rogron house as quietly as possible. He reverently kissed the poor martyr's hand.

The aspect of old Madame Lorrain, as she stood, a sublime spectre, by her grandchild's bedside, made the carpenter and his wife shudder. Horror

PIERRETTE ASSAULTED

Sylvie wrung her arm and tried to force the fingers open; and, finding all her efforts fruitless, she wantonly buried her nails in the flesh. At last, frantic with rage, she put Pierrette's hand to her teeth.

* * * * * * * * *

"*Help! help!*" *cried Pierrette,* "*they are killing me!*"

"*Aha! you shriek, do you, when I catch you with a lover in the middle of the night?—*"

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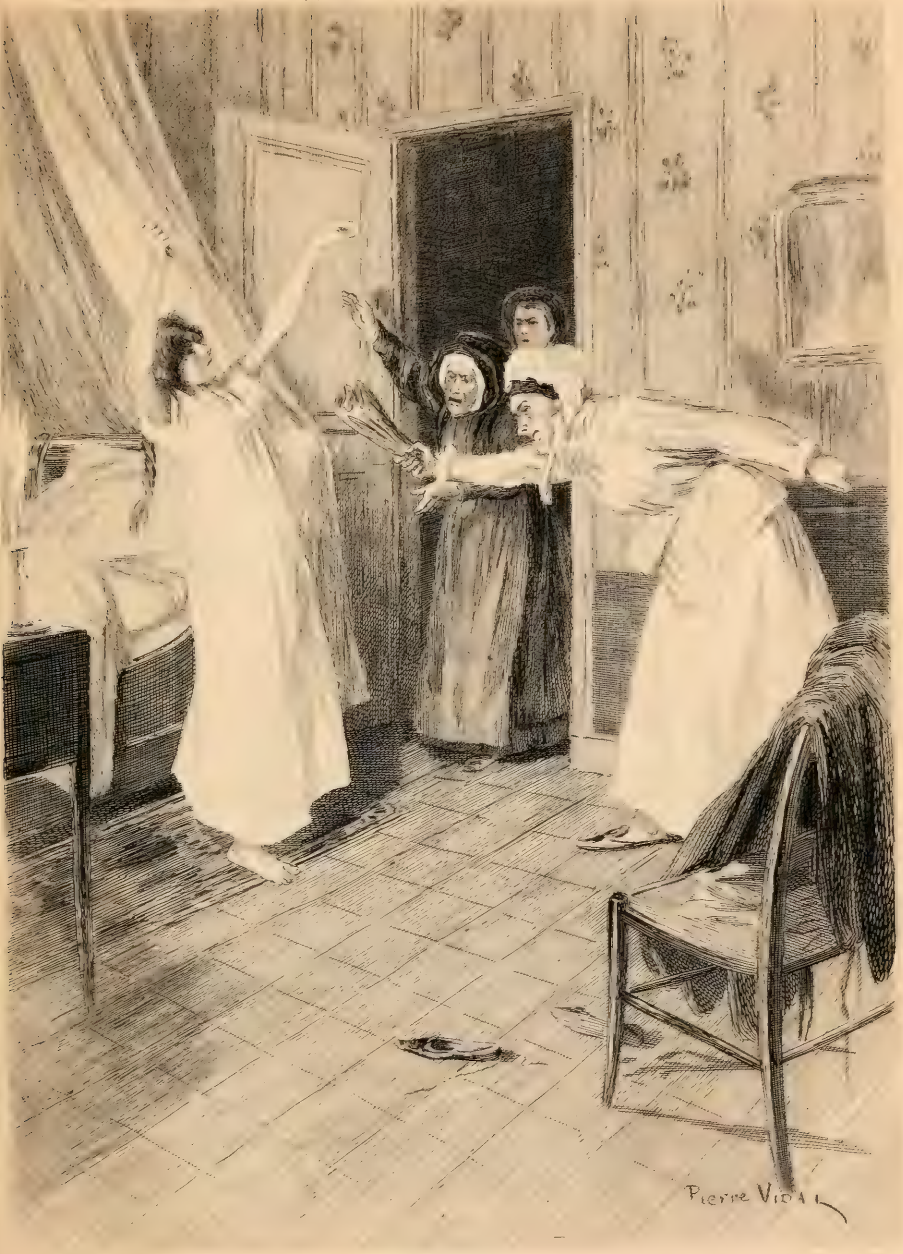
Pierre Vidal

and thirst for revenge traced their fiery lines in the myriads of wrinkles that roughened her face with its skin like yellow ivory. Her brow, covered with thin gray hair, expressd divine wrath. With the intuitive faculty bestowed upon aged people who are approaching the grave, she read Pierrette's whole story, of which she had been thinking throughout her journey. She divined the nature of the disease that threatened her beloved child with death! Two great tears, springing painfully from her white and gray eyes, from which the lashes and eyebrows had been worn away by suffering, two pearls of grief took shape, imparted to those eyes a ghastly brightness, increased in size and trickled down her withered cheeks, but did not moisten them.

"They have killed her!" she said at last, clasping her hands.

She fell upon her knees, which struck the floor with a hollow sound, and offered up a prayer, doubtless, to Sainte Anne d'Auray, the most influential of Bretagne madonnas.

"A doctor from Paris!" she said to Brigaut. "Hurry, Brigaut, away with you!"

She took the young mechanic by the shoulders, and pushed him toward the door with an imperious commanding gesture.

"I was coming, Brigaut; I am rich, see!" she cried, recalling him.

She loosened the cord that held the two parts of her undergarment together across her breast, took out a paper in which forty-two banknotes were wrapped, and said:

"Take what you need! Bring the best doctor in Paris."

"Stay," said Frappier, "he can't change a note now; I have money at hand, the diligence will pass here and he can get a seat then; but, before he does that, wouldn't it be better to consult Monsieur Martener, who would tell you what doctor to get from Paris? The diligence won't come for an hour, we have time enough."

Brigaut went and called up Monsieur Martener. He brought the doctor back with him, not a little surprised to learn that Mademoiselle Lorrain was at the Frappiers'. Brigaut described the scene that had taken place at Rogron's house. The prolixity of a lover in despair cast some light upon this domestic drama, although the doctor had no suspicion of its horror or its extent. Martener gave Brigaut the address of the celebrated Horace Bianchon, and he started off with his master when they heard the rumbling of the diligence. Monsieur Martener sat down, examined first the bruises and the wounds on the hand, which was hanging down on the outside of the bed.

"She didn't make these wounds herself," he said.

"No, the horrible creature to whom I was unfortunate enough to entrust her was killing her," said the grandmother. "Poor Pierrette cried: 'Help! I am dying!' in a voice such as would break a hangman's heart."

"But why?" asked the doctor, feeling Pierrette's pulse. "She is very ill," he continued, bringing a light to the bed.—"It will be very hard to save her," he added, when he had seen her face. "She must have suffered terribly and I don't understand why she hasn't been taken care of."

"It is my intention to complain to the authorities," said the grandmother. "These people wrote to me for my granddaughter, saying they had twelve thousand francs a year; had they any right to make her do their cooking and work beyond her strength?"

"And they refused to see the signs of the most unmistakable of the diseases to which young girls are sometimes subject, and which demanded the greatest care?" cried Monsieur Martener.

Pierrette was aroused by the light Madame Frappier held close to her face and by the horrible pain that the mental reaction from her struggle caused in her head.

"Oh! Monsieur Martener, I am very sick," she said in her sweet voice.

"Where do you feel pain, my dear?" said the doctor.

"Here," she said, pointing to the top of her head, above her left ear.

"There's an abscess there!" exclaimed the doctor, after he had felt her head for a long while and questioned Pierrette closely as to the nature of the pain. "You must tell us everything, my child, so that we can cure you. Why is your hand in this condition? You didn't make such wounds yourself."

Pierrette artlessly told the story of her battle with her cousin Sylvie.

"Make her talk," the doctor said to the grandmother, "and find out everything. I will wait until the doctor from Paris arrives and then we will call in the chief surgeon of the hospital and consult: it seems to me a very serious matter. I will send you a soothing draught which you will give mademoiselle to make her sleep; she is greatly in need of it."

Left alone with her granddaughter, the old lady induced her to disclose everything by making use of her influence over her, by telling her that she was rich enough for all three, and that Brigaut should remain with them. The poor child confessed her martyrdom, not dreaming of the legal proceedings that were to follow. The monstrous performances of those two heartless creatures, who had no conception of family ties, disclosed to the old woman whole worlds of agony that were as far from her thoughts as were the manners and customs of the savage tribes from those of the first explorers who penetrated the American prairies. Her grandmother's arrival, the certainty of being with her thereafter and of being rich, put Pierrette's mind to sleep, as the sleeping draught did her body. The old Bretonne sat beside her granddaughter, kissing her forehead, her hair and her hands, as the holy women kissed Jesus when they laid Him in the tomb.

At nine o'clock in the morning, Monsieur Martener called upon the president, to whom he described the scene of the preceding night between Sylvie and Pierrette, together with the moral and physical torture, the ill-usage of every sort that the Rogrons had inflicted on their ward, and the two mortal diseases that had developed as a result of this cruel treatment. The president sent for Auffray, the notary, a kinsman of Pierrette on her mother's side.

At this moment the war between the Vinet party and the Tiphaine party was at its height. The stories that the Rogrons and their allies circulated through the town concerning Madame Roguin's open *liaison* with the banker Du Tillet and the circumstances connected with the failure of Madame Tiphaine's father, who, they said, was a forger, made a greater impression on the Tiphaine party because, for all their malice, they were true, and not mere slanders. The wounds they made cut to the heart, they touched the one sore spot. These remarks, being repeated to the partisans of the Tiphaines by the same mouths that retailed to the Rogrons the jests of the fair Madame Tiphaine and her friends, fed the fire of hatred, which was thenceforward complicated by a political element. The irritation caused in France at this time by party spirit, which was excessively violent in its manifestations, joined forces everywhere, as in Provins, with threatened selfish interests, with wounded and militant self-love. Each of these factions seized with avidity upon anything that might injure the rival faction. Party animosity was as deeply involved as selfishness in matters of the most trifling importance, which often went very far. A whole town would take part excitedly in some personal dispute and raise it to the dignity of a political conflict.

Thus the president saw in the difficulty between Pierrette and the Rogrons a means of humbling, of casting shame and discredit upon the master and mistress of the salon where plots against the monarchy were worked out, where the newspaper organ of the opposition was born. The king's attorney was summoned. Monsieur Lesourd, Monsieur Auffray the notary, appointed guardian *ad interim* of Pierrette, and the president, in conjunction with Monsieur Martener, took counsel together in the most absolute secrecy, as to the proper course to pursue. Monsieur Martener undertook to tell the grandmother to enter a complaint to the guardian *ad interim*, who would thereupon convoke the family council, and, armed with the opinion of the physicians, would in the first place ask for the removal of the guardian. The affair, being thus brought to a head, would be in condition to come before the court, and Monsieur Lesourd would thereupon institute a criminal prosecution by praying for an investigation.

About noon all Provins was in a fever of excitement over the strange rumors of what had taken place during the night in the Rogron house. Pierrette's shrieks had been vaguely heard upon the square, but they had lasted only a short time; nobody got up, but everybody asked everybody else:

"Did you hear the noise and shrieks about one o'clock? what was it?"

The reports and comments thereon had so exaggerated this ghastly drama that a crowd collected in front of Frappier's shop, and everyone sought information from the worthy carpenter, who described the girl's arrival at his house with her hand bleeding and fingers bruised. About one o'clock in the afternoon Doctor Bianchon's post-chaise, containing the doctor and Brigaut, stopped in front of Frappier's house, and his wife ran to the hospital to summon Monsieur Martener and the chief surgeon. Thus the current rumors were confirmed. The Rogrons were accused of having designedly maltreated their cousin and of having brought her near to death's door.

The news reached Vinet's ears at the court-house: he left everything and went to Rogron's house. Rogron and his sister were just finishing their breakfast. Sylvie hesitated to tell her brother of her mishap of the night, and was allowing him to press her with questions without other reply than: "That doesn't concern you." She went back and forth from the dining-room to the kitchen to avoid the discussion. She was alone when Vinet appeared.

"Don't you know what is going on?" the advocate asked her.

"No," said Sylvie.

"You're going to have a criminal prosecution on your hands, from the way things are going with Pierrette."

"A criminal prosecution!" said Rogron, entering the room just then. "Why? what about?"

"First of all," cried the advocate, with a searching glance, "tell me plainly what took place last night, as if you were in the presence of God, for there's talk of having to amputate Pierrette's hand."

Sylvie turned deathly pale and shuddered.

"There's something in it then?" said Vinet.

Mademoiselle Rogron described the scene, attempting to excuse herself; but, when pressed with questions, she admitted the serious incidents of the struggle.

"If you have simply bruised her fingers, you will have to go before the police court only; but, if her hand has to be amputated, you may be summoned before the assizes; the Tiphaines will do all they can to send you there."

Sylvie, more dead than alive, confessed her jealousy, and, what was even harder for her to confess, that her suspicions were entirely unfounded.

"What a case it will be!" said Vinet. "You and your brother may be utterly ruined by it; even if you win, many people will turn their backs on you. If you don't win, you must leave Provins."

"Oh! dear Monsieur Vinet, you are such a great lawyer, advise us, save us!" said Rogron in dire dismay.

Vinet adroitly inflamed the terror of the two fools to the highest pitch, and declared positively that Madame and Mademoiselle de Chargebœuf were hesitating about coming again to their house. To be abandoned by those ladies would be a terrible blow. At last, after an hour of magnificent manœuvring, it was tacitly understood that, if Vinet was to undertake to save the Rogrons, he must appear in the eyes of all Provins to have a powerful motive for defending them. Accordingly the marriage of Rogron with Mademoiselle Chargebœuf must be announced that evening. The banns must be published on Sunday. The contract was to be drawn up at once by Cournant, and Mademoiselle Rogron was to be a party to it and, in consideration of the alliance, to convey the reversion of her property to her brother by a gift *inter vivos.* Vinet had made Rogron and his sister understand the necessity of having a marriage contract prepared two or three days before the trial, in order to compromise Madame and Mademoiselle de Chargebœuf in the eyes of the public, and to give them a reason for persisting in coming to Rogron's house.

"Sign the contract, and I will take it upon myself to get you out of this trouble," said the advocate. "No doubt it will be a bitter fight, but I will give my whole energy to it, and you'll have reason to be grateful to me!"

"Yes, indeed!" said Rogron.

At half-past eleven the advocate had full powers both for the contract and for the management of the trial. At noon a complaint was laid before the president by Vinet, charging Brigaut and the widow Lorrain with enticing the minor Lorrain from her guardian's domicile. Thus the audacious Vinet assumed the offensive and placed Rogron in the attitude of an irreproachable man. He spoke of him in that light in the court-room. The president appointed four o'clock as the time for hearing the parties. It is needless to say that the little town of Provins was turned topsy-turvy by these successive events. The president knew that the consultation of the physicians would be concluded at three o'clock; and he desired the guardian *ad interim*, to appear in the grandmother's behalf, armed with their report.

The announcement of Rogron's marriage to the fair Bathilde de Chargebœuf and of the advantages which Sylvie was conferring in the contract, instantly alienated two persons from the Rogrons: Mademoiselle Habert and the colonel, both of whom saw their hopes blighted. They continued their ostensible intimacy with the Rogrons, but only in order to injure them the more surely. For instance, as soon as Monsieur Martener disclosed the existence of an abscess in the head of the haberdashers' poor victim, Céleste and the colonel spoke of the blow Pierrette had given herself on the evening when Sylvie forced her to leave the room, and recalled Mademoiselle Rogron's savage and unfeeling exclamations. They detailed the proofs of the old maid's hard-heartedness toward her sick ward. In this way the friends of the family were required to uphold serious misconduct if they appeared to defend Sylvie and her brother. Vinet had foreseen this storm; but the fortune of the Rogrons was surely won for Mademoiselle de Chargebœuf, and he proposed within a few weeks to see her living in the fine house on the square and reign with her over Provins, for he was already meditating projects of fusion with the Bréauteys in the interest of his ambition.

Between noon and four o'clock all the women of the Tiphaine faction, the Garcelands, the Guépins, the Julliards, Galardons and Guénées, and the subprefect's wife, sent to inquire for Mademoiselle Lorrain. Poor Pierrette was entirely ignorant of the commotion of which she was the cause. Amid her agonizing suffering she felt an ineffable happiness in being with her grandmother and Brigaut, the two objects of her affection. Brigaut's eyes were constantly filled with tears, and the grandmother petted and caressed her darling child. God knows whether the old lady spared the three medical men a single one of the details she had gathered from Pierrette concerning her life in the Rogron household. Horace Bianchon expressed his indignation in unmeasured terms. Aghast at such barbarity, he insisted that all the other physicians in the town should be summoned, so that Monsieur Néraud was present, and was invited, as Rogron's friend, to dissent, if there were any ground for so doing, from the terrible conclusions of the consultation, which, unfortunately for the Rogrons, were assented to unanimously. Néraud, who was generally supposed to have been the cause of the death, from grief, of Pierrette's grandmother, was placed in a false position, which Martener adroitly turned to advantage, overjoyed to administer a telling blow to the Rogrons, and at the same time to compromise his rival. It is needless to give the text of the report of this consultation, which was one of the exhibits at the trial. Medical terms in Molière's day were barbarous things, perhaps, but those of modern medicine have the advantage of being so clear, that the description of Pierrette's trouble, although a natural and unhappily a common one, appalled the ears that heard it. The report was conclusive, however, having the sanction of a name so famous as Horace Bianchon's.

After the regular daily audience, the president did not leave his seat, as he saw Pierrette's grandmother enter the hall, accompanied by Monsieur Auffray, Brigaut and a large number of sympathizers. Vinet was alone. This contrast impressed the audience, which was increased by a great number of curious spectators. Vinet, who had not removed his gown, looked up at the president with his expressionless face, fixing his spectacles over his green eyes; then with his sharp, piercing voice, he set forth that strangers had made their way at night into the house of Monsieur and Mademoiselle Rogron and had removed therefrom one Pierrette Lorrain, a minor. She was legally bound to remain with her guardian, who demanded his ward. Monsieur Auffray, as guardian *ad interim*, rose and asked leave to reply.

"If Monsieur le Président," he said, "will deign to take cognizance of this report that I hold in my hand of a consultation held by one of the most eminent physicians of Paris, and all the physicians and surgeons of Provins, he will understand the absurdity of Sieur Rogron's demand, and what weighty motives impelled the grandmother of the minor to remove her at once from the custody of her murderers. These are the facts: the unanimous result of a consultation held by an illustrious physician of Paris, summoned in great haste, and by all the medical men of this town, is to attribute the almost inevitably fatal condition of the minor at the present time to the ill-treatment she has received from Sieur Rogron and his sister. As required by law, the family council will be convoked as soon as possible, and consulted as to the question of discharging the guardian from his trust. We pray that the minor be not required to return to the domicile of her guardian, but may be entrusted to such member of the family as it may please Monsieur le Président to designate."

Vinet attempted to reply to the effect that the report should have been communicated to him, to give him an opportunity to contradict it.

"Not to you," said the president sternly, "but possibly to the king's attorney. The cause has been heard."

The president wrote at the foot of the petition the following order:

"Whereas, by the unanimous report of a consultation of the physicians of this town with Doctor Bianchon, of the Faculty of Medicine of Paris, it appears that the minor child, Pierrette Lorrain, whose custody is claimed by Rogron, her guardian, is in an extremely grave physical condition by reason of the harsh treatment and abuse inflicted upon her in the said guardian's house and by his sister,

"We, president of the court of first instance at Provins,

"Having considered the prayer of the within petition, do order that, pending the decree of the family council, which is to be convoked in accordance with the declaration of the guardian *ad interim*, the said minor shall not be returned to the said guardian's domicile, but shall be transferred to the house of the said guardian *ad interim*.

"And we do further order, in consideration of the said minor's physical condition, and of the indications of violence which, as is stated in the report of the physicians, exist upon her person, that the chief physician and chief surgeon of the hospital of Provins do visit the said minor from time to time; and, in the event of the evil effects of the ill-treatment aforesaid continuing, we reserve the whole matter for the action of the public authorities, without prejudice to the civil process instituted by Auffray, guardian *ad interim*."

This crushing decree was read by President Tiphaine in a loud, distinct voice.

"Why not the galleys at once?" said Vinet. "And all this bother over a little girl who was carrying on an intrigue with a carpenter's apprentice! If matters are to be conducted in this way," he added insolently, "we shall apply for a change of venue on legitimate grounds of prejudice."

Vinet left the court-house and went about among the principal men of his party to explain Rogron's position, who had never laid a finger on his cousin, he said, and in whom the magistrate saw not so much Pierrette's guardian as the great elector of Provins.

According to his statements, the Tiphaines were making a great outcry over nothing at all. The mountain was giving birth to a mouse. Sylvie, an eminently virtuous and pious woman, had discovered an intrigue between her brother's ward and a young journeyman carpenter, a Breton named Brigaut. The rascal knew very well that the girl would have a fortune from her grandmother, and he tried to suborn her.—Vinet dared to talk of subornation!—Mademoiselle Rogron, who had letters in her possession that left no doubt of the girl's waywardness, was not so blameworthy as the Tiphaines wanted to make people believe. Even if she had allowed herself to use violence to obtain possession of a letter, which might well be explained by the natural irritation aroused in Sylvie by the child's Breton obstinacy, how was Rogron to blame?

The advocate thus made a party affair of the legal proceedings and succeeded in giving them a political color. Consequently, public opinion thenceforth was divided on the subject.

"The man that hears only one bell knows only one note," said the wiseacres. "Have you heard what Vinet has to say? Vinet explains the thing very well."

The Frappier house was considered an unsuitable place for Pierrette, because the noise caused her to suffer terribly in her head. Her removal to the house of the guardian *ad interim* was as necessary medically as legally. The transfer was made with infinite precautions that were calculated to produce a great effect. Pierrette was placed upon a litter with quantities of mattresses, and carried by two men; a Gray Sister walked beside her with a bottle of ether in her hand, and the grandmother, Brigaut, Madame Auffray and her maid followed on behind. People stood at windows and doors to see the procession pass. Beyond question, Pierrette's condition, her deathly pallor, all contributed to give an immense advantage to the anti-Rogron party. The Auffrays maintained that they would show the whole town how abundantly justified the president was in making the order he did. Pierrette and her grandmother were installed on the second floor of Monsieur Auffray's house. The notary and his wife lavished the most generous hospitality upon them; there was more or less ostentation in their conduct. Pierrette was nursed by her grandmother, and Monsieur Martener and the surgeon called upon her that evening.

Thereupon the respective factions began to vie with each other in exaggeration. Rogron's salon was well filled. Vinet had worked successfully upon the liberal party in that direction. The two Chargebœuf ladies dined with the Rogrons, for the marriage contract was to be signed there that evening. In the morning Vinet had caused the banns to be posted at the mayor's office. He treated the Pierrette affair as of no consequence. If the Provins tribunal was guided by passion, the royal court would examine the facts dispassionately, he said, and the Auffrays would look twice before involving themselves in such litigation. The alliance of Rogron with the Chargebœufs had a tremendous effect upon a certain class of people. In their eyes the Rogrons were white as snow, and Pierrette was an exceedingly wayward child, a viper warmed in their bosom. In the Tiphaine salon they had their revenge for the horrible stories the Vinet party had been circulating for two years past: the Rogrons were monsters, and the guardian would be sent before the assizes. On the square, Pierrette was said to be in perfect health; in the Upper Town, she was hopelessly ill; at Rogron's, she had a few scratches on her wrist; at Madame Tiphaine's, her fingers were broken and one of them was to be amputated.

The next morning, *Le Courrier de Provins* contained an extremely adroit, well-written article, a masterpiece of insinuation mingled with legal arguments, which placed Rogron out of danger. *La Ruche*, which did not appear until two days later, could not retort without lapsing into defamatory statements; it replied, however, that in such matters the better way was to let the law take its course.

The family council was appointed by the justice of the peace of the canton of Provins, president *ex officio;* it consisted of Rogron and the two Messieurs Auffray, the nearest kindred, and of Monsieur Ciprey, nephew of Pierrette's maternal grandmother. To these he added Monsieur Habert, Pierrette's confessor, and Colonel Gouraud, who had always represented himself as a comrade of Major Lorrain. There was much applause for the impartiality of the magistrate in including in the family council Monsieur Habert and Colonel Gouraud, whom all Provins supposed to be very friendly to the Rogrons. In the serious plight in which he was placed, Rogron requested the assistance of master Vinet in the family council. By this manœuvre, evidently inspired by Vinet, he succeeded in postponing the meeting of the council until the latter part of December. At that time the president and his wife had taken up their quarters at Madame Roguin's in Paris, because of the session of the Chambers. Thus the ministerial party was left without its leader. Vinet had already worked secretly upon Desfondrilles, the examining magistrate, in case the affair should take on the criminal phase that the president had tried to give it. Vinet argued the case three hours before the family council: he insisted upon the existence of an intrigue between Brigaut and Pierrette, in order to justify Mademoiselle Rogron's severity; he maintained that the guardian had pursued a perfectly natural course in leaving his ward under the control of a woman; he dwelt upon his client's non-participation in the manner in which Pierrette's education was conducted by Sylvie.

Despite Vinet's efforts, however, the council was unanimously of the opinion that Rogron should be removed as guardian. Monsieur Auffray was appointed guardian and Monsieur Ciprey guardian *ad* *interim.* The council heard the testimony of Adèle, the maid-servant, who did not spare her former employers; of Mademoiselle Habert, who narrated the cruel words used by Mademoiselle Rogron on the evening when Pierrette dealt her head the violent blow that everybody heard, and the remark as to Pierrette's health made by Madame de Chargebœuf. Brigaut produced the letter he had received from Pierrette, which proved their innocence. It was demonstrated that the minor's deplorable condition was chargeable to a lack of proper care on her guardian's part, he being the responsible party in everything that concerned his ward. Pierrette's illness had been patent to everybody, even to townspeople not acquainted with the family. Thus the charge of ill-treatment against Rogron was sustained. The case was to be turned over to the courts.

Advised by Vinet, Rogron opposed the confirmation of the findings of the family council by the court. The prosecuting attorney's office intervened, in view of the increase in gravity of Pierrette Lorrain's physical condition. This extraordinary cause, though placed at once upon the roll of causes for trial, was not reached until March, 1828.

*

The marriage of Rogron and Mademoiselle de Chargebœuf was promptly celebrated. Sylvie occupied the second floor of the house, which was rearranged for her accommodation and Madame de Chargebœuf's, the whole first floor being given over to Madame Rogron. The fair Madame Rogron stepped into the fair Madame Tiphaine's shoes. The marriage had a far-reaching influence. People no longer came to Sylvie's salon, but to Madame Rogron's.

Supported by his mother-in-law and by the royalist bankers, Du Tillet and Nucingen, President Tiphaine was able to make himself useful to the ministry; he was one of the most highly esteemed orators of the Centre, became a judge of the court of first instance of the department of the Seine, and procured the appointment of his nephew, Lesourd, as president of the court at Provins. This appointment was a severe blow to Desfondrilles, still an archæologist and more than ever an assistant judge. The Keeper of the Seals sent down one of his protégés to take Lesourd's place. Thus Monsieur Tiphaine's promotion was followed by no promotions among his associates in the Provins tribunal. Vinet cleverly made the most of this circumstance. He had always told the people of Provins that they served simply as stepping-stones to grandeur for the crafty Madame Tiphaine. The president was trifling with his friends. Madame Tiphaine secretly despised the town of Provins and would never come back there. Monsieur Tiphaine the elder died, his son inherited the estate of Fay and sold his fine house in the Upper Town to Monsieur Julliard. That sale proved how little idea he had of returning to Provins. Vinet was right. Vinet was a prophet. These facts had a great influence upon the litigation relative to Rogron's guardianship.

Thus the horrible martyrdom brutally inflicted on Pierrette by two foolish tyrants, and resulting, in its medical consequences, in causing Monsieur Martener, with Doctor Bianchon's approval, to prescribe the appalling operation of trepanning—this ghastly drama, reduced to legal proportions, took its place in that vile mess which is called, at the Palais de Justice, formalities. The cause dragged its slow length along through the interminable labyrinths of procedure, delayed at every step by the prolixity of a pettifogging lawyer; while poor slandered Pierrette pined away and suffered the most horrible agony known in medicine. Should we not explain this singular reversal of public opinion and the slow progress of the law, before returning to the room in which she lay languishing and dying?

Monsieur Martener, as well as the whole Auffray family, was fascinated ere long by Pierrette's lovely character, and by the old Bretonne, whose sentiments and ideas and manners were of the ancient

Roman stamp. This matron of the Marais resembled one of Plutarch's women. The physician determined to do battle with death for this victim, for he, as well as his *confrère* from Paris, looked upon Pierrette as lost. There ensued, between the disease and the physician—the latter supported by his patient's youth—one of those conflicts of which physicians alone have any knowledge, and whose reward, in case of success, is never found in the paltry price of their labors, nor indeed under the patient's roof; but in the sweet gratification of the conscience, in an ideal, invisible guerdon, bestowed upon true artists by the satisfaction they feel in the certainty of having accomplished a worthy work. The physician aims at doing good as the artist aims at the beautiful, impelled by a noble sentiment which we call virtue. This conflict, renewed day after day, had extinguished in Monsieur Martener's mind the paltry annoyances of the strife between the Tiphaine and the Vinet parties, as is usually the case with men who find themselves face to face with intense suffering to be allayed.

Monsieur Martener had begun by practising in Paris; but the appalling activity of that city, the insensibility to suffering which the terrifying number of patients and the multiplicity of serious cases inevitably impart to the physician, had stricken with dismay his kindly heart, made for provincial life. Moreover, he had never shaken off the yoke of his attractive province. So he returned to Provins to marry and settle down, and to minister, almost with affection, to the ailments of a population which he could look upon as one large family. Throughout Pierrette's illness he made it a point not to speak of his patient. His disinclination to reply, when anyone asked him about the poor child's condition, was so perceptible that people ceased to question him on the subject. Pierrette was to him, as she should have been, one of the profound and mysterious poems, painful beyond description, that are found in the grand and terrible life of a physician. He felt an admiration for that delicate girl which he did not propose to divulge to any person.

This feeling of the physician for his patient, like all genuine feelings, had communicated itself to Monsieur and Madame Auffray, whose house was peaceful and quiet as long as Pierrette was there. The children, who had once played so happily with Pierrette, promised, with the charming grace of children, not to be noisy or teasing. It was a point of honor with them to be good, because Pierrette was ill. Monsieur Auffray's house was in the Upper Town, just below the ruins of the castle, and was built upon one of the ridges produced by the demolition of the ancient ramparts. There is a fine view of the valley from the little garden surrounded by high walls, from which you can jump down into the town. The roofs of the other houses touch the outer edge of the wall that supports the garden. Along the terrace is a path that ends at the long window of Monsieur Auffray's study. At the other end are a vine-covered arbor and a fig-tree, beneath which stands a round table, with a bench and chairs painted green. They had given Pierrette a room above her new guardian's study. Madame Lorrain slept on a cot beside her granddaughter's bed. From her window Pierrette could see the beautiful valley of Provins, which she hardly knew; she had gone out so little from the fatal Rogron house! When the weather was fine, she loved to drag herself on her grandmother's arm as far as the arbor.

Brigaut, who had ceased to work, came three times a day to see his friend; he was consumed by a sorrow that made him deaf to everything else; he watched Monsieur Martener with the keen scent of a hunting-dog, always came to the house with him and went away with him. You could hardly imagine the extravagant things that everyone did for the dear little invalid. Beside herself with grief, the grandmother nevertheless concealed her despair, and her child saw only the smiling face she had seen at Pen-Hoël. In her desire to deceive herself, she refurbished the Breton cap Pierrette wore when she first came to Provins, and made her wear it. In that guise the child seemed to her more like herself; she was a delicious sight with her face surrounded by that halo of white cambric trimmed with starched lace. Her face, white with the whiteness of porcelain, her forehead, upon which suffering imprinted an expression as of deep thought, the purity of the outlines sharpened by illness, the weary movement of her eyes and the fixity of her gaze at times—all combined to make of Pierrette a wonderfully beautiful image of melancholy. The child was nursed and waited upon with a sort of fanaticism. She was so sweet and gentle and so affectionate! Madame Martener sent her piano to her sister Madame Auffray's, with the hope of affording some entertainment to Pierrette, who was passionately fond of music. It was a poem to watch her listening to a piece by Weber, Beethoven or Hérold, with uplifted eyes, silent, and regretting doubtless the life that she felt slipping from her. Abbé Péroux, the curé, and Monsieur Habert, her two religious comforters, marveled at her pious resignation. Is not the seraphic perfection attained by young men and women who, among the crowd, are marked with a red cross by death, as young trees are marked in a forest—is it not a remarkable fact, worthy the attention, not of philosophers alone but of all unthinking people? The man who has witnessed one of those sublime deaths could never become or remain an unbeliever. Such creatures exhale a sort of celestial perfume, their glances speak of God, their voices are eloquent in the most unimportant matters, and often sound like divine instruments, giving utterance to the secrets of the future! When Monsieur Martener congratulated Pierrette upon having conscientiously followed some difficult prescription, the angel said, in the presence of all, and with such a speaking glance:

"I want to live, dear Monsieur Martener, less for myself, than for my grandmother, and my Brigaut and all of you, who will grieve for my death."

The first time that she walked out—it was in November, in the lovely Indian summer—accompanied by the whole household, she said, when Madame Auffray asked her if she were tired:

"Now that I have no other sufferings to bear than those sent by God, I can bear them. I find strength to suffer in the joy of being loved."

This was the only time that she referred, even in a roundabout way, to her horrible martyrdom at the hands of the Rogrons, of whom she never spoke; and the thought of them was likely to be so painful to her, that no one mentioned them in her presence.

"Dear Madame Auffray," she said one day, at noon, when she was out upon the terrace gazing at the valley lying in the bright sunlight and embellished with the lovely reddish tints of autumn, "my suffering at your house will have given me more happiness than all these last three years."

Madame Auffray looked at her sister, Madame Martener, and whispered in her ear:

"How she would have loved!"

In very truth, Pierrette's tone and expression gave an indescribable force to her words.

Monsieur Martener was in constant correspondence with Doctor Bianchon and attempted nothing of importance without his approval. He hoped in the first place to assist nature to resume her functions, and in the second place to discharge the abscess in the head through the ear. The sharper the pain the greater his hopes. He had some slight success in the first direction, and it was a great triumph. For some days Pierrette's appetite was normal and she fed upon substantial dishes for which her disease had hitherto caused her to feel a characteristic repugnance; her color improved, but the head was in a horrible condition. At last Martener requested the great physician, his adviser, to come. Bianchon came, remained at Provins two days, and decided upon an operation; he shared poor Martener's anxiety and went himself to secure the services of the illustrious Desplein. Thus the operation was performed by the greatest surgeon of ancient or modern times; but that awe-inspiring oracle said to Martener, as he and Bianchon, his favorite disciple, were going away together:

"You can save her only by a miracle. As Horace has told you, caries of the bone has begun. At her age, the bones are so soft!"

The operation took place in the early part of March, 1828. During that month, Monsieur Martener, alarmed by Pierrette's terrible suffering, went several times to Paris; he consulted Desplein and Bianchon, to whom he went so far as to suggest an operation similar in character to lithotrity, and consisting in introducing into the head a hollow instrument by means of which they could attempt the application of a heroic remedy to stop the progress of the caries. Even the adventurous Desplein did not dare attempt that surgical *coup de main*, which despair had suggested to Martener. So it was that, when the physician returned from his last visit to Paris, he seemed disappointed and morose to his friends. On a certain memorable evening, he was compelled to announce to the Auffray family, Madame Lorrain, the confessor and Brigaut, that science could do nothing more for Pierrette, whose salvation was entirely in the hands of God. Horrible consternation followed his words. The grandmother prayed aloud and directed the curé to say a mass, at which she and Brigaut would be present, every morning at daybreak, before Pierrette left her bed.

Meanwhile the famous cause came on for trial. While the Rogrons' victim was dying, Vinet was calumniating her to the tribunal. The tribunal confirmed the decision of the family council, and the advocate at once entered an appeal. The new king's attorney filed a demand for an investigation on the criminal side of the court, and an order to that effect was entered. Rogron and his sister were obliged to find sureties in order to avoid arrest. The order for an investigation required the examination of Pierrette. When Monsieur Desfondrilles called at Auffray's house, Pierrette was dying; her confessor was at her bedside and the sacrament was about to be administered. At that moment, she was entreating her assembled family to forgive her two cousins as she forgave them, saying, with marvelous self-restraint, that it was for God alone to pass judgment in such matters.

"Grandmother," she said, "leave all your property to Brigaut."—Brigaut burst into tears.—

"And," continued Pierrette, "give a thousand francs to dear Adèle, who warmed my bed on the sly. If she had remained with my cousins, I should have lived—"

On Easter Tuesday, a lovely day, at three o'clock, the little angel ceased to suffer. Her heroic grandmother insisted upon watching through the night with the priests, and sewing her into her winding-sheet with her own old hands. Toward evening Brigaut left the house and went down to Frappier's workshop.

"I don't need to ask you the news, my poor boy," said the carpenter.

"Yes, Père Frappier, it's all over for her, but not for me."

The young journeyman cast a sorrowful but intelligent glance around upon the lumber in the shop.

"I understand you, Brigaut," said Frappier. "Take whatever you need."

And he pointed to some two-inch oak planks.

"Don't help me, Monsieur Frappier," said the Breton; "I want to do it all myself."

Brigaut passed the night fitting and planing Pierrette's coffin, and more than once the shavings that followed his plane were wet with his tears. Goodman Frappier stood by watching him, and smoking. He did not speak except when his journeyman was putting the four pieces together.

"Run the lid in a groove," he said; "her poor relatives won't hear any hammering then."

At daybreak Brigaut went out to procure the necessary lead to line the coffin. By an extraordinary coincidence the sheets of lead cost exactly the same sum that he had given Pierrette for her journey from Nantes to Provins. The true-hearted Breton, who had fought successfully against the bitter pain of making the coffin for the dear companion of his childhood, lining the burial planks with all his memories, gave way at this curious coincidence; his strength failed him and he could not carry the lead. The plumber accompanied him, offering to go and solder the fourth sheet, when the body was in the coffin. The Breton burned his plane and all the tools he had used, settled his accounts with Frappier and bade him adieu. The heroic determination with which this poor boy devoted himself, as did the grandmother, to performing the last sad rites for Pierrette, was the cause of his participation in the last scene that crowned the tyranny of the Rogrons.

Brigaut and the plumber arrived at Monsieur Auffray's in sufficient time to decide by their brute strength an infamous and horrifying legal question. The death chamber was filled with people and presented a singular spectacle to the two mechanics. The Rogrons stood hideous beside the dead body of their victim, to torture her even after death. The poor child's body, sublimely beautiful, lay on her grandmother's cot bed. The eyes were closed, the hair in *bandeaux*, the body sewn in a coarse cotton sheet.

Beside the bed was old Madame Lorrain, on her knees, with disheveled hair and outstretched hands, crying:

"No, no, you shall not do it!"

At the foot of the bed were Monsieur Auffray, the guardian, the curé Péroux and Monsieur Habert. The tapers were still burning.

Facing the grandmother stood the surgeon from the hospital and Monsieur Néraud, supported by the repulsive, wily Vinet. A court official also was present. The surgeon wore his dissecting apron. One of his assistants had opened his instrument-case and was just handing him a dissecting knife.

The scene was disturbed by the noise made by the coffin, as Brigaut and the plumber let it fall; for Brigaut, who walked first, was terror-stricken at the sight of old mother Lorrain weeping.

"What does this mean?" demanded Brigaut, taking his place beside the grandmother, and convulsively clutching a chisel that he held in his hand.

"It means, Brigaut," said the old woman, "it means that they want to open my child's body, break her head and her heart, after her death as they did during her life."

"Who?" roared Brigaut in a voice loud enough to deafen the officers of the law.

"The Rogrons."

"By the holy name of God!"

"One moment, Brigaut," said Monsieur Auffray, as he saw the Breton brandishing his chisel.

"Monsieur Auffray," said Brigaut, as pale as the dead girl herself, "I listen to you because you are Monsieur Auffray; but at this moment I wouldn't listen to—"

"The law?" said Auffray.

"Is there any law?" cried the Breton. "There's your law!" he added, pointing his chisel, which gleamed in the sunlight, at the advocate, the surgeon and the usher.

"My friend," said the curé, "the law has been invoked by Monsieur Rogron's advocate, whose client is charged with a serious offence, and it is impossible to refuse an accused person the means of defending himself. According to Monsieur Rogron's advocate, if this poor child died from the abscess in her head, her former guardian could not be held liable; for it has been proved that Pierrette concealed for a long time the blow she gave herself—"

"Enough!" said Brigaut.

"My client—" Vinet began.

"Your client will go to hell and I to the scaffold; for if anyone of you makes a motion to touch the girl your client murdered, and if the doctor yonder doesn't put up his tool, I'll kill him on the spot."

"This is rebellion," said Vinet; "we will go and inform the court."

The five men withdrew.

"O my son!" said the old woman, springing to her feet and throwing herself on Brigaut's neck, "let us bury her quickly, they will come back!—"

"Once the lid is soldered on," said the plumber, "perhaps they won't dare do anything more."

Monsieur Auffray hurried off to his brother-in-law, Monsieur Lesourd, to try to arrange the affair. Vinet desired nothing more. Now that Pierrette was dead, the litigation relating to the guardianship, in which no decision had been rendered, died of inanition, as there was nothing to be said either for or against Rogron: the question remained undecided. The crafty Vinet, you see, had rightly estimated the effect his application would produce.

At noon, Monsieur Desfondrilles made his report to the court concerning the examination in the case of Rogron, and the court rendered a judgment, based upon plausible grounds, that there was nothing calling for further proceedings.

Rogron did not dare to show himself at Pierrette's funeral, at which the whole town was present. Vinet tried to force him to go, but the ex-haberdasher was afraid of arousing universal horror.

Brigaut left Provins after he had seen the last spadeful of earth thrown into the grave in which Pierrette was buried, and went on foot to Paris. He wrote a petition to the Dauphiness for admission to the King's Guards, invoking his father's name, and was at once enrolled. When the Algiers expedition set out, he wrote again to the Dauphiness, asking to be sent upon that expedition. He was a sergeant and Maréchal Bourmont appointed him sub-lieutenant in the line. The major's son acted like a man who wished to die. But death has thus far respected Jacques Brigaut, who has distinguished himself in all the recent expeditions without being once wounded. To-day he is major in a line regiment. There is no more taciturn, no better officer. Outside of his duties he is almost mute, walks alone and lives like a machine. Everyone divines and respects a hidden grief. He possesses forty-six thousand francs, bequeathed to him by old Madame Lorrain, who died in Paris in 1829.

At the elections of 1830, Vinet was chosen deputy, and the services he has rendered the new government have procured him the post of *procureur-général.* His influence now is such that he will always be chosen deputy. Rogron is receiver-general in the same municipality in which Vinet performs his functions; and, by a most surprising coincidence, Monsieur Tiphaine is first president of the royal court there, for the magistrate cast in his lot without hesitation with the dynasty of July. The ex-fair Madame Tiphaine lives on the best of terms with the fair Madame Rogron. Vinet and President Tiphaine are warm friends.

As for Rogron, the imbecile, he makes such remarks as this:

"Louis-Philippe will not be really king until he can create nobles!"

This remark is evidently not his own. His failing health has aroused in Madame Rogron's breast the hope that she may before long be able to marry General the Marquis de Montriveau, a peer of France, who commands the department, and is very attentive to her. Vinet is unremitting in his pursuit of victims; he never believes in the innocence of an accused person. This thoroughbred *procureur-général* is esteemed one of the most amiable men in the profession, and he has had no less success in Paris and the Chamber; at court, he is a charming courtier.

In accordance with Vinet's promise, General the Baron Gouraud, that noble relic of our glorious armies, has married a Mademoiselle Matifat, aged twenty-five years, daughter of a druggist on Rue des Lombards, whose dowry was fifty thousand crowns. As Vinet had prophesied, he is in command of a department near Paris. He has been created a peer of France by reason of his conduct during the *émeutes* under the ministry of Casimir-Périer. Baron Gouraud was one of the generals who captured the church of Saint-Merri, delighted to *administer a drubbing to the civilians*, who had annoyed them for fifteen years, and his ardor has been rewarded by the grand ribbon of the Legion of Honor.

No one of the persons who had a hand in Pierrette's death suffers from remorse. Monsieur Desfondrilles is still an archæologist; but, with an eye to his own election, Vinet has taken care to have him appointed president of the tribunal. Sylvie has a little court of her own and looks after her brother's property; she lends at high interest and spends less than twelve hundred francs a year.

From time to time, when a child of Provins returns from Paris to settle down in his native place, and is seen coming from the Rogron house on the little square, some former partisan of the Tiphaines will say to him:

"The Rogrons once had a serious trouble on their hands because of a ward—"

"A mere party affair," President Desfondrilles will reply. "They tried to make people believe that monstrous crimes were committed. Through pure kindness of heart they took this Pierrette into their family—a pretty little thing she was, without fortune; just as she was maturing she had an intrigue with a carpenter's apprentice, went to her window barefooted to talk with him as he stood outside, d'ye see? The lovers exchanged billets-doux by means of a string. You understand, that, in her condition, nothing more than that was needed—in October and November—to wreck a girl's health, who suffered from chlorosis. The Rogrons behaved extremely well, they claimed no part of the girl's inheritance, but gave up everything to her grandmother. The moral of all this, my friends, is that the devil always punishes us for doing a good deed."

"Ah! but that's a very different story; Père Frappier put another face on the whole matter."

"Père Frappier consults his cellar more than his memory," chimes in an habitué of Mademoiselle Rogron's salon.

"But old Monsieur Habert—"

"Oh! you know about him, don't you?"

"No."

"Why, he wanted to marry his sister to Monsieur Rogron, the receiver-general."

Two men think of Pierrette every day of their lives: they are Doctor Martener and Major Brigaut, who alone know the horrible truth.

To give immense proportions to this episode, it is enough to recall the fact that, in the Middle Ages, upon the vast Roman stage, a sublime young girl, Beatrice Cenci, was led to the scaffold by motives and intrigues almost analogous to those that led Pierrette to the grave. Beatrice Cenci had no defenders save an artist and a painter. To-day, history and living men, upon the strength of Guido Reni's portrait, condemn the Pope and look upon Beatrice as one of the most touching victims of infamous passions and of party cabals.

Let us agree between ourselves that legality would be an excellent cloak for social rascality, if God did not exist.

November, 1839.

THE CELIBATES

SECOND STORY

THE CURÉ OF TOURS

TO DAVID, SCULPTOR

The duration of the work upon which I inscribe your name, twice illustrious in this century, is very problematical; while you carve mine upon bronze which survives the death of nations, even though it be only stamped by the vulgar die of the minter. Will not the numismatists of the future be puzzled by the number of crowned heads in your studio, when they find among the ruins of Paris these existences prolonged by you beyond the life of nations, in which they will seek to discover new dynasties?

To you, that divine privilege; to me, gratitude.

DE BALZAC.

THE CURÉ OF TOURS

*

At the beginning of the autumn of the year 1826, Abbé Birotteau, the principal character of this narrative, was overtaken by a shower as he was returning from the house where he had passed the evening. Therefore he walked as fast as his corpulence would permit across the little deserted square, called *The Cloister*, that lies behind the choir of Saint-Gatien at Tours.

Abbé Birotteau was a slight, short man, of apoplectic habit and about sixty years old, who had already had several attacks of gout. Now, of all the petty vexations of human life, that to which the priest had the most intense aversion was the sudden immersion of his shoes with their large silver buckles, and the wetting of their soles. Indeed, notwithstanding the flannel hose in which he enveloped his feet in all sorts of weather with the care that churchmen always take of themselves, they always got a little damp at such times; and then, on the following day, the gout infallibly gave him some proofs of its constancy. Nevertheless, as the pavement of the Cloister is always dry, and as the abbé had won three francs and ten sous at whist at Madame de Listomère's, he bore the rain with resignation from the middle of Place de l'Archevêché, at which point it began to fall in torrents. Moreover, at that moment he was fondling his chimera, a longing already twelve years old, a veritable priest's longing, a longing which took shape every evening and seemed at this time very near fulfilment; in short, he was too warmly wrapped in the amice of a canonry to heed the inclemency of the weather. During the evening, the regular habitués of Madame de Listomère's salon had almost guaranteed his appointment to the vacant post of canon in the metropolitan chapter of Saint-Gatien, proving to his satisfaction that no one was more deserving of the appointment than he, and that his claims thereto, long overlooked, were incontestable. If he had lost at cards, if he had learned that Abbé Poirel, his rival, had secured the appointment, then the good man would have thought the rain very cold. Perhaps he would have spoken ill of life in general. But it was for him one of those infrequent occasions when pleasant sensations make one forget everything else. In quickening his pace, he acted in obedience to an instinctive impulse, and truth, which is so essential in a history of manners, compels us to state that he was thinking neither of the shower nor of the gout.

Formerly there were several houses in one enclosure on the side of the Cloister toward Grand' Rue, belonging to the cathedral and occupied by some dignitaries of the chapter. After the confiscation of the property of the clergy, the city made of the passage that ran between these houses a street, called Rue de la *Psalette*, leading directly from the Cloister to Grand' Rue. That name is a sufficient indication that the preceptor once lived there, with his choir boys and all those connected with the choir. On the left-hand side of this street there is but one house, and its walls are so penetrated by the flying buttresses of Saint-Gatien, which are planted in its narrow little garden, that one is left in doubt whether the cathedral was built before or after this venerable dwelling. But, upon examining the arabesques and the shape of the windows, the archway of the door, and the whole exterior of the time-worn structure, an archæologist sees at once that it has always been a part of the magnificent pile to which it is wedded. An antiquary—if there be one at Tours, which is one of the least literary cities of France—may even discover, at the Cloister end of the street, some vestiges of the arch which once formed the doorway of these ecclesiastical abodes, and which evidently harmonized with the general character of the building.

Situated on the northern side of Saint-Gatien, the house in question is always in the shadow of that noble cathedral, upon which time has thrown its cloak of black, imprinted its seams, and sown its chill dampness, its moss and its tall, dark grass. And so the house is always wrapped in profound silence, interrupted only by the clanging of the bells, by the music of the services that is audible through the walls of the church, or by the cawing of the jackdaws whose nests are in the high towers. The spot is a desert of stone, a solitude full of character, which can be inhabited only by beings whose intelligence is absolutely *nil*, or who are blessed with prodigious strength of mind. The house in question had always been occupied by abbés, and belonged to an old maid, one Mademoiselle Gamard. Although the property had been purchased from the nation, during the Terror, by Mademoiselle Gamard's father—as the old maid had let lodgings to priests for twenty years past, no one was inclined to find fault, under the Restoration, because so devout a person retained property thus acquired: it may well be that the religious people attributed to her a purpose to bequeath it to the chapter, and that worldly people did not consider its changed uses.

Abbé Birotteau directed his steps toward that house, where he had lived for two years. His apartments had been, like his canonry, the object of his desire and his *Hoc erat in votis* for many years. To lodge with Mademoiselle Gamard and to become a canon were his two great interests in life; it may be said, indeed, that they summarize exactly the ambition of a priest, who, considering himself as being a mere sojourner on earth on his way to immortality, can reasonably desire nothing more than a good bed, good food, warm garments, silver-buckled shoes, wealth sufficient for his animal needs, and a canonry to gratify his self-esteem, that unspeakable sentiment which will cling to us, they say, even in God's presence, because there are social castes among the saints. But Abbé Birotteau's hankering for the apartment now occupied by him, that sentiment, of trifling importance in the eyes of worldly people, had been to him a downright passion, a passion full of obstacles, and, like the most criminal passions, running over with hope and pleasure and remorse.

The interior arrangement and size of her house did not permit Mademoiselle Gamard to accommodate more than two lodgers. About twelve years before Birotteau became an inmate of her house, she had undertaken to maintain in health and comfort Monsieur l'Abbé Troubert and Monsieur l'Abbé Chapeloud. Abbé Troubert was still living. Abbé Chapeloud was dead and Birotteau immediately succeeded him in his apartments.

The late Monsieur l'Abbé Chapeloud, in his lifetime canon of Saint-Gatien, had been Abbé Birotteau's intimate friend. Whenever the vicar entered the canon's rooms, he was loud in his praise of the location, the furniture and the library. Of this admiration was born one day the longing to possess all those beautiful things. It had been impossible for Abbé Birotteau to stifle that longing, which caused him untold suffering when he reflected that nothing but the death of his best friend could satisfy his cupidity, concealed to be sure, but always increasing in intensity.

Abbé Chapeloud and his friend Birotteau were not wealthy. They were both sons of peasants and they had no other means than the trifling emoluments accorded to priests; and their inconsiderable savings were all expended in the unhappy days of the Revolution. When Napoléon re-established the Catholic religion, Abbé Chapeloud was appointed canon of Saint-Gatien, and Birotteau became vicar of the cathedral. Chapeloud thereupon took up his quarters at Mademoiselle Gamard's. When Birotteau came to visit the canon in his new domicile, he considered the apartment perfectly arranged; but he saw nothing else. The beginning of this concupiscence of goods and chattels was like that of a genuine passion, which, in a young man, sometimes begins with a very lukewarm admiration for the woman whom, later on, he will love forever.

The apartment in question, reached by a stone staircase, was in an ell on the southern side of the house. Abbé Troubert occupied the ground floor, and Mademoiselle Gamard the first floor of the main building on the street. When Chapeloud took possession, the rooms were bare and the ceilings black with smoke. The supports of the wretchedly carved stone mantel-pieces had never been painted. The poor canon's only furniture consisted at first of a bed, a table, two or three chairs and the few books he owned. The apartment resembled a lovely woman in rags. But, two or three years later, having received a bequest of two thousand francs from an elderly lady, he employed that sum in the purchase of an oak bookcase, rescued from the ruins of a château demolished by the Bande Noire,* and remarkable by reason of carvings worthy the admiration of artists. The abbé made that purchase, less because of the excellent bargain he obtained than because the dimensions of the bookcase accorded so perfectly with those of the gallery. His savings made it possible for him to renovate the whole gallery, which was very shabby, having been neglected up to that time. The floor was carefully scrubbed, the ceiling whitened, and the wainscoting painted to imitate the marks and knots of old oak. The former chimney-piece was replaced by a marble one. The canon had the good taste to seek and find some old armchairs of carved walnut. A long ebony table and two Boulle cabinets put the finishing touch to decorations that gave the apartment a decided character of its own. Within two years the liberality of several pious persons, together with divers legacies from his penitents, although of small amount, served to fill the hitherto untenanted shelves of the bookcase with books. Lastly, an uncle of Chapeloud, a former Oratorian, left him his folio collection of the Fathers of the Church, and several other huge tomes, precious in the eyes of a churchman.

Birotteau, more and more surprised by the successive transformations of this gallery, once so bare, arrived by slow degrees, and involuntarily, at a covetous frame of mind. He longed to be the proprietor of that study, so thoroughly in keeping with the gravity of ecclesiastical manners. The passion increased from day to day. Accustomed as he was to pass whole days at work in that place of refuge, the vicar was able to appreciate its silence and tranquillity, after he had first of all admired its convenient arrangement.

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*Bande Noire. A term originated under the Restoration and still applied to certain speculators who buy old properties which they pull down and sell the materials piecemeal.

During the years that followed, Abbé Chapeloud made of this cell of his an oratory, which his devout lady friends took pleasure in adorning. Later still, a lady presented the canon with a tapestry-covered piece of furniture for his bedroom, which she had been long at work upon under the excellent man's eyes, albeit he had no suspicion of its destination. Thereupon it was the same with the bedroom as with the gallery; it fairly dazzled the vicar.

At last, three years before his death, Abbé Chapeloud crowned the splendor of his apartments by decorating his salon. Although simply upholstered in red Utrecht velvet, the furniture fascinated Birotteau. From the day when the canon's friend saw the curtains of red lampas, the mahogany furniture, the Aubusson carpet that embellished that large, freshly-painted room, Chapeloud's apartments became to him the subject of a concealed monomania. To live there, to sleep in the bed with heavy silk curtains in which the canon slept, and to have all the conveniences of life under his hand as Chapeloud had them, was to Birotteau's conception perfect happiness; he could imagine none greater. All the envy and ambition that worldly prosperity inspires in the hearts of other men was concentrated in Birotteau's case in the secret, deeply-rooted sentiment with which he longed for a home like that Abbé Chapeloud had made for himself. When his friend fell sick, his ministrations were certainly influenced by sincere affection; but, when he learned that his friend was ill, or when he sat at his bedside, a thousand thoughts passed through his mind, in spite of himself, the burden of which was always this:

"If Chapeloud should die, I might have his rooms."

However, as Birotteau had a soft heart, narrow ideas, and a limited intelligence, he did not go so far as to consider the means of inducing his friend to bequeath his library and his furniture to him.

Abbé Chapeloud, an amiable and indulgent egotist, divined his friend's passion—which was not a difficult feat—and forgave him—which may seem a less simple matter in a priest. But the vicar, whose friendship was unshaken, continued to walk every day with his friend on the same path of the Mall, and never once defrauded him of a single moment of the time they had devoted to that walk for twenty years past. Birotteau, who looked upon his involuntary cravings as sins, would have been quite capable, through contrition, of the most unbounded devotion to Abbé Chapeloud. The latter acquitted his indebtedness to so sincere a brotherly affection by saying to the vicar, as he was reading *La Quotidienne* to him a few days before his death:

"This time you will have the rooms. I have a feeling that it's all over with me."

In fact Abbé Chapeloud, by his last will and testament, bequeathed his library and his furniture to Birotteau. The possession of those objects, so ardently desired, and the prospect of being taken to board by Mademoiselle Gamard, lightened in great measure Birotteau's grief for the loss of his friend the canon; he wept for him, but perhaps he would not have brought him back to life. For some days he was like Gargantua, who, when his wife died in giving birth to Pantagruel, could not determine whether he ought to rejoice at the birth of his son or grieve at having to bury his faithful Badbec, and who solved the difficulty by rejoicing at his wife's death and deploring the birth of Pantagruel. Abbé Birotteau passed the first days of his mourning in verifying the list of books in *his* library, using *his* furniture, scrutinizing it, and saying, in a tone which, unfortunately, cannot be written down: "Poor Chapeloud!" In fact, his joy and his grief absorbed him so entirely that he felt no pang when the post of canon was bestowed upon another, although the late Chapeloud had hoped that Birotteau would be his successor therein.

Mademoiselle Gamard having gladly taken the vicar to board, he enjoyed thenceforth all the material pleasures of life which the defunct canon had vaunted to him. Inestimable advantages! If the lamented Abbé Chapeloud was to be believed, not one of all the priests to be found in the city of Tours, the archbishop not excepted, could possibly be the object of such delicate, painstaking attentions as were lavished by Mademoiselle Gamard upon her two boarders. The first words the canon said to his friend as they met on the Mall almost always had reference to the delicious dinner he had just eaten, and it very rarely happened that he did not say at least fourteen times during the seven walks of the week:

"That excellent creature certainly has a vocation to the ecclesiastic service. Just think of it," said the Abbé Chapeloud to Birotteau, "for twelve consecutive years I have never once run short of clean linen,—albs, surplices, bands, I always find everything in its place, in sufficient numbers, and fragrant with orris-root. My furniture is polished, and always so thoroughly wiped that I haven't known what dust is for a long time. Did you ever see a single speck of it in my room? Never! Then the firewood is carefully selected, and even the smallest things are excellent in their way; in fact, it seems to me that Mademoiselle Gamard always has an eye on my room. I don't remember that I have ever had to ring twice in ten years, no matter what I might want. That's the way to live! Not to have to look for anything, even one's slippers. To be sure of always finding a good fire and a good table. Once my bellows bothered me, the nozzle was choked up; but I didn't complain of it twice.

Basta! mademoiselle gave me a pretty little bellows and that pair of tongs you see me poke the fire with."

Birotteau would reply simply:

"Fragrant with orris-root!"

That *fragrant with orris-root* always impressed him. The canon's words denoted happiness beyond expression to the poor vicar, whose bands and albs made people turn their heads to look after him; for he had no system about anything and often forgot to order his dinner. And so, whenever he saw Mademoiselle Gamard at Saint-Gatien, whether he happened to be taking up the offertory or saying mass, he never failed to bestow upon her a kindly, benevolent glance, such a glance as a Sainte-Thérèse might have directed heavenward.

The only blessing that every living creature desires, and of which he had so often dreamed, had fallen to his lot. As it is hard for anybody, even for a priest, to exist without a hobby, Abbé Birotteau had, for the last eighteen months, replaced his two gratified passions by the craving for a canonry. The title of canon had become to him what the peerage must be to a minister of plebeian extraction. So that the probability of his appointment and the hopes upon which he had been fed at Madame de Listomère's had turned his head so completely, that he did not remember that he had forgotten his umbrella until he reached his own abode. It may be that he would not have remembered it even then, had not the rain come down in torrents, he was so absorbed by the zest with which he was going over in his own mind all that had been said to him on the subject of his promotion by the guests of Madame de Listomère, an old lady with whom he always passed Wednesday evening.

The vicar rang the bell sharply, as if to tell the maid not to keep him waiting. Then he huddled into the corner of the doorway in order to save himself from the wet as much as possible; but the water from the roof fell upon the toes of his shoes, and the wind, at short intervals, blew the rain in upon him in sheets, like a shower-bath. Having reckoned the time necessary to leave the kitchen and draw the cord that ran under the door, he rang again, with such emphasis as to produce a very significant jangling.

"They can't have gone out," he said to himself, hearing no sound inside the house.

And he rang the bell a third time, with a clamor that resounded so sharply through the house and was repeated so conscientiously by all the echoes of the cathedral, that it was impossible not to be awakened by the uproar. A few moments later he heard, not without considerable satisfaction mingled with ill-humor, the maid-servant's wooden shoes clattering over the pebbly courtyard. Nevertheless, the gouty old fellow's troubles did not end as soon as he anticipated. Instead of drawing the cord, Marianne was obliged to unlock the door with the huge key and throw back the bolts.

"Why do you make me ring three times in such weather?" said the abbé.

"Why, monsieur, the door was locked, you see. Everybody went to bed long ago; it's quarter to ten. Mademoiselle must have thought you didn't go out."

"But you saw me go, yourself! Besides, mademoiselle knows perfectly well that I go to Madame de Listomère's every Wednesday."

"Faith, monsieur, I did what mademoiselle told me to do," said Marianne, as she closed the door.

These words dealt Abbé Birotteau a blow which he felt the more because his reverie had made him so perfectly happy. He said no more, but followed Marianne to the kitchen to get his candlestick, which he supposed he should find there. But Marianne, instead of going into the kitchen, led the way to the abbé's own room, where he saw his candlestick on a table by the door of the red salon, in a sort of reception-room formed by the landing of the staircase, which the deceased canon had separated from the hall by a glass partition. Speechless with surprise, he at once entered, found no fire on the hearth, and called Marianne, who had not as yet had time to go downstairs.

"You haven't lighted a fire," he said.

"Excuse me, Monsieur l'Abbé," she replied. "It must have gone out."

Birotteau looked again at the hearth and made sure that the fire had been covered up since morning.

"I must dry my feet," he said; "make a fire for me."

Marianne obeyed with the alacrity of a person who is anxious to go to sleep. As he looked about for his slippers, which were not in the middle of his rug as usual, the abbé indulged in divers reflections upon the way in which Marianne was dressed, going to show that she had not left her bed to admit him, as she claimed. Thereupon he remembered that for about a fortnight he had been obliged to do without all the little attentions that had made life so sweet to him for eighteen months past. Now, as it is the natural bent of narrow minds to investigate unimportant details, he suddenly fell a-musing upon these four events which another man would not have noticed, but which, to him, were four startling catastrophes. It was very evident that the total destruction of his well-being was foreshadowed in the neglect to lay out his slippers, in Marianne's falsehood concerning the fire, in the unusual position of his candlestick on the reception-room table, and in his enforced delay at the door, in the rain.

When the fire was blazing on the hearth, when the night-lamp was lighted and Marianne had left him without the question she used always to ask: "Does monsieur wish anything else?" Abbé Birotteau allowed himself to sink gently into the luxurious and ample reclining-chair of his departed friend; but there was a touch of melancholy in the movement. The good man was depressed by forebodings of a horrible calamity. His eyes wandered from the handsome clock to the commode, the chairs, the curtains, the rugs, the square bed, the holy-water basin, the crucifix, a *Virgin* by Valentin, a *Christ* by Lebrun—in a word, to all the accessories of the apartment; and the expression of his face betokened a grief as great as that with which the most affectionate of lovers says adieu to his first mistress, or an old man to the trees he has just planted. The vicar had just noticed, a little late to be sure, the indications of a policy of silent persecution put in force against him some three months before by Mademoiselle Gamard, whose malevolent intentions would doubtless have been detected much sooner by a brighter man. Have not all the old maids a talent for emphasizing the acts and the words their hatred suggests to them? They scratch like cats. They not only wound, but they take pleasure in wounding, and in making their victim see that they have wounded him. In a position where a man of the world would not have allowed himself to be clawed twice, honest Birotteau needed to be clawed several times in the face before believing in a malicious intent.

With the inquisitorial skill acquired by priests who are accustomed to direct consciences and to unearth trifles in the confessional, Abbé Birotteau, as if some controverted religious question were at issue, set about establishing the following proposition:

"Admitting that Mademoiselle Gamard forgot about Madame de Listomère's Wednesdays, that Marianne forgot my fire, and that they thought I was in the house; inasmuch as I, yes, I myself! took down *my candlestick* this morning!!! it is impossible that Mademoiselle Gamard could have thought I was in bed when she saw it in her salon.

Ergo, Mademoiselle Gamard intended to keep me at the door in the rain; and, by taking my candlestick up to my room, she meant me to understand—What?" he said aloud, carried away by the gravity of the matter in hand as he rose to remove his damp clothes, and put on his bedgown and nightcap.

Then he strode back and forth between his bed and the fireplace, gesticulating and emitting the following phrases in different tones, all ending, however, in a falsetto shriek, as if to take the place of exclamation points:

"What the deuce have I done? Why should she bear me a grudge? Marianne couldn't have forgotten my fire! Mademoiselle must have told her not to light it! One must be a child not to see, from her tone and manner to me, that I have had the misfortune to offend her. Nothing like this ever happened to Chapeloud! It will be impossible for me to live in the midst of annoyances that—At my age, too!"

He went to bed with the hope of discovering, the next morning, the cause of the malevolence that bade fair to destroy forever the bliss he had enjoyed for two years, after he had sighed for it so long. Alas! the secret motives of Mademoiselle Gamard's evident aversion to him were destined to remain forever unknown to him; not that they were difficult to guess, but because the poor man lacked the good faith with which great minds and rascals examine and judge themselves. Only men of genius and schemers say to themselves: "I was wrong."

Self-interest and talent are the only conscientious, intelligible advisers.

Now Abbé Birotteau, whose good-nature almost amounted to idiocy, whose education was laid on externally, so to speak, by hard work, who had no experience of the world or its ways, and who lived between the mass and the confessional, mainly occupied in deciding the most trivial cases of conscience, in his capacity of confessor of the boarding-schools of the city and of some kindly souls who appreciated his real worth—Abbé Birotteau might fairly be looked upon as a great child, to whom the majority of social canons were entirely unknown. But the egotism natural to all human beings, reinforced by the selfishness peculiar to the priest and by that of the narrow life of the provinces, had insensibly developed in him without his suspecting it. If anyone had taken sufficient interest to probe the vicar's soul and prove to him that, in the infinitely petty details of his existence and the most trivial duties of his private life, he was notably deficient in the devotion which he professed, he would have punished and humbled himself in good faith. But those whom we offend, even unintentionally, rarely give us credit for our innocence; they seek to avenge themselves and generally find a way. Birotteau therefore, feeble though he was, was destined to bow to the will of that great distributive Justice which goes about bidding the world to execute its judgments, called, by some fools, *the misfortunes of life.*

There was this difference between Abbé Chapeloud and the vicar: the one was a shrewd and clever egotist, the other an artless and bungling egotist. When Abbé Chapeloud went to board with Mademoiselle Gamard, he was perfectly well able to fathom his hostess's character. The confessional had taught him to understand the bitterness that fills the heart of an old maid who is unable to gain admission into society; he therefore regulated his conduct under Mademoiselle Gamard's roof with great caution. The landlady, being then not quite thirty-eight years of age, still retained some pretensions, which, in the case of such discreet persons as Mademoiselle Gamard, change eventually to extravagant self-esteem. The canon understood that, in order to live on pleasant terms with her, he must never flag in his attentions to her and must be more infallible than the pope himself. To obtain that result he avoided all points of contact with her except such as were absolutely enjoined by the laws of the country, and such as necessarily exist between two people living under the same roof. Thus, although Abbé Troubert and he regularly ate three meals a day, he had abstained from appearing at the breakfast table, having led Mademoiselle Gamard into the practice of sending to him in bed a cup of coffee with cream. Then he had avoided the *ennui* of supper by always taking tea at the houses where he passed his evenings. In this way he rarely saw his landlady except at dinner; but he always came to dinner a few moments before the appointed hour. During that little visit he invariably asked her the same questions, throughout the whole twelve years he had passed under her roof, and invariably received the same replies. How Mademoiselle Gamard had slept the night before, his breakfast, the little domestic happenings, her general appearance, her physical condition, the weather, the length of the service, the incidents of the mass, the health of this or that priest—such subjects formed the staple of this periodical conversation. During dinner he always indulged in indirect flattery, constantly veering from the excellence of a fish, the incomparable seasoning of a sauce, to Mademoiselle Gamard's merits and virtues as a landlady. He was certain of flattering the old maid's vanity in every direction by praising the skill with which her pickles, her preserves, her pies and other gastronomic masterpieces were prepared. Lastly, the crafty canon never left his landlady's yellow salon without observing that there was no house in Tours where one could get such coffee as that he had just been drinking.

Thanks to this perfect understanding of Mademoiselle Gamard's character, and to this scientific mode of life practised by the canon for twelve years, there had never been the slightest occasion for discussion between them in any matter of internal discipline. Abbé Chapeloud had at once detected the angles, the asperities, the rough surface, of the old maid and regulated the action of the inevitable tangents of their two personalities in such a way as to obtain from her all the concessions essential to the happiness and tranquillity of his life. Wherefore Mademoiselle Gamard was accustomed to say that Abbé Chapeloud was a very agreeable man, extremely easy to get along with, and very intelligent.

As to Abbé Troubert, Mademoiselle Gamard said absolutely nothing at all. Having taken his place in her life as completely as a satellite takes its place in the orbit of its planet, Troubert was to her a sort of intermediate being between the human and canine species; he occupied a position in her heart immediately before that set apart for her friends and that occupied by a fat, broken-winded pug, which she loved dearly; she ruled him absolutely, and their interests seemed to be so entirely identical, that many persons in Mademoiselle Gamard's social circle believed that Abbé Troubert had designs upon the old maid's money, was insensibly making himself necessary to her by unremitting patience, and guided her steps the more surely by seeming to obey her, without allowing her to detect the slightest desire on his part to lead her.

When Abbé Chapeloud died, the old maid, who desired a lodger of genteel manners, naturally thought of the vicar. Before the contents of the canon's will were known, Mademoiselle Gamard meditated giving the deceased dignitary's apartments to her dear Abbé Troubert, whom she considered very badly off on the ground floor. But when Abbé Birotteau came to arrange with her the terms of his board and lodging, she saw that he was so enamored of the rooms for which he had so long cherished a desire, which he was at no further pains to conceal, that she dared not suggest an exchange, and subordinated her affection to the requirements of self-interest. To console her beloved canon, mademoiselle replaced the large white Château-Regnaud bricks with which his rooms were floored by a wooden floor of the style called *point d'Hongrie*, and rebuilt a smoking chimney.

Abbé Birotteau had seen his friend Chapeloud every day for twelve years, but it had never once occurred to him to inquire the cause of the extreme circumspection of his relations with Mademoiselle Gamard. When he took up his abode with that saint-like maiden, he found himself in the position of a lover on the point of being made happy. Even if he had not been naturally devoid of intelligence, his eyes were so dazzled by happiness that it was not possible for him to judge Mademoiselle Gamard, and to reflect upon the proper measures to adopt in his daily relations with her. Seen from afar and through the mist of the material felicities that he dreamed of enjoying beneath her roof, Mademoiselle Gamard seemed to the vicar to be a perfect creature, an accomplished Christian woman, essentially charitable, the woman of the Gospel, the wise virgin, adorned with those humble and modest virtues which impart a celestial perfume to life. And so, with all the enthusiasm of a man who attains a long-desired end, with the innocent candor of a child and the unthinking folly of an old man without worldly experience, he entered Mademoiselle Gamard's life, as a fly allows itself to be entangled in a spider's web. So it was that, on the first day that he dined and slept in the old maid's house, he was detained in her salon by the desire to become acquainted with her, as well as by the inexplicable embarrassment that often weighs upon timid people and makes them hesitate to interrupt a conversation by leaving the room, lest it seem discourteous. So he remained there the whole evening. Another old maid, a friend of Birotteau, Mademoiselle Salomon de Villenoix by name, came in during the evening. Thus Mademoiselle Gamard was able, to her joy, to organize a game of boston. When he retired for the night, the vicar considered that he had passed a very pleasant evening.

As he had only a very slight acquaintance with Mademoiselle Gamard and Abbé Troubert, he saw only the outside varnish of their characters. Few people disclose their faults openly at first. Generally speaking, everyone tries to assume an attractive exterior. It came about, therefore, that Abbé Birotteau conceived the delightful project of devoting his evenings to Mademoiselle Gamard, instead of passing them at his friends' houses. The landlady had, for several years past, cherished a desire, which gained strength from day to day. This desire, which many old men and even the prettiest women form, had become in her case a passion like Birotteau's for his friend Chapeloud's apartments, and was rooted in her heart by the sentiments of pride and selfishness, of envy and vanity, which overshadow all others in people of the world. This is a story adapted to all epochs; we need only expand a little the circle in which our characters are about to perform, to find a satisfactory explanation of events that come to pass in the most exalted social spheres.

Mademoiselle Gamard was accustomed to pass her evenings at six or seven different houses, one after another. Whether it was that she disliked to be obliged to go in search of society, and deemed herself entitled, at her age, to demand some return; or that her self-esteem would have been wounded to have no social circle of her own; or that her vanity craved the compliments and favors she saw her friends enjoying,—whatever the reason, her whole ambition was to make her salon a point of reunion to which a certain number of persons should wend their steps every evening, *with pleasure.*

One afternoon, as she came out of the cathedral of Saint-Gatien,—it was after Birotteau and his friend Mademoiselle Salomon had passed several evenings at her house, together with the faithful and patient Abbé Troubert,—Mademoiselle Gamard remarked to her good friends, whose slave she had hitherto considered herself, that people who cared to see her might come once a week to her house, where enough of her friends assembled to make a game of boston; she could not leave Abbé Birotteau, her new boarder, alone; Mademoiselle Salomon had not yet missed a single evening that week; she belonged to her friends; and—and—etc., etc. Her words were the more humbly proud and overflowing with honey, because Mademoiselle Salomon de Villenoix belonged to the most aristocratic society in Tours. Although Mademoiselle Salomon came solely through friendship for the vicar, it was a triumph for Mademoiselle Gamard to have her in her salon, and she fancied herself, thanks to Abbé Birotteau, upon the point of bringing to a successful issue her great project of organizing a circle which might become as numerous and as agreeable as those of Madame de Listomère, Mademoiselle Merlin de la Blottière, and other devotees, who were already in possession of the field as entertainers of the religious society of Tours. But alas! Abbé Birotteau caused Mademoiselle Gamard's hopes to come to naught.

If all those who, in the course of their lives, have succeeded in enjoying some long-wished-for pleasure, can understand the joy that filled the vicar's heart when he found himself sleeping in Chapeloud's bed, they should also be able to form some slight idea of Mademoiselle Gamard's chagrin at the overthrow of her cherished plan. After patiently enough submitting to his lot for six months, Birotteau deserted the house, taking Mademoiselle Salomon with him. Despite her superhuman efforts, the ambitious Gamard had enlisted no more than five or six persons, whose constant attendance was very problematical, and at least four faithful souls were necessary to make up a table of boston. She was compelled therefore to submit graciously and to return to her former friends, for old maids find their own company too disagreeable not to seek the doubtful pleasures of society.

The cause of this desertion is readily understood. Although the vicar was one of those to whom paradise is some day to belong by virtue of the decree: *Blessed are the poor in spirit!* he could not, as many idiots can, endure the *ennui* caused by the society of other idiots. Witless men and women resemble the noxious weeds that flourish in rich soil, and they are the more anxious to be amused because they are such terrible bores to themselves. The incarnation of *ennui* of which they are victims, combined with the need they feel of being constantly taken out of themselves, produces that passion for movement, that longing to be always where they are not, which is their distinguishing characteristic, as it is that of beings without feeling and of those who have failed to fulfil their destiny, or who suffer by their own fault.

Without attempting to probe Mademoiselle Gamard's utter nullity and insignificance too far, and without fully realizing the paltriness of her ideas, poor Abbé Birotteau discovered, a little late, unfortunately for him, certain defects which she shared with all old maids, as well as certain others which were peculiar to her. The evil, in other people, trenches so closely upon the good, that it almost always attracts our notice before it offends us. This moral phenomenon would justify, at need, the inclination that impels us more or less strongly, toward evil speaking. It is, socially speaking, so natural to make sport of another's imperfections, that we ought to forgive the bantering gossip that our absurdities justify, and wonder at nothing less atrocious than downright calumny. But the good vicar's eyes had never attained the keenness of vision that makes it possible for men of the world to see and avoid in time their neighbor's asperities; he was obliged therefore, before discovering his landlady's defects, to undergo the warning nature gives to all her creatures—pain!

Old maids, having never forced their characters and their lives to adapt themselves to the characters and lives of other people, as the destiny of woman demands, have, as a general rule, a mania for forcing everything about them to adapt itself to their ways. In Mademoiselle Gamard's case that mania degenerated into despotism; but it was a despotism that concerned itself only with trifles. To give one instance among a thousand—the basket of markers and counters, placed upon the boston table for Abbé Birotteau's benefit, must remain just where she put it, and the abbé annoyed her beyond measure by moving it, which he did almost every evening. Whence came that absurd sensitiveness about trifles, and what was its purpose? No one could have answered the question; Mademoiselle Gamard did not know herself. Although he was naturally a good deal of a sheep, the new boarder liked no better than the other sheep to feel the crook too often, especially when it was provided with sharp points. Without seeking an explanation of Abbé Troubert's exemplary patience, Birotteau determined to deprive himself of the happiness which Mademoiselle Gamard essayed to season to his taste, for she believed that it was the same with happiness as with her sauces. But the unhappy man went about it in a bungling way, as a result of the unsuspecting innocence of his character; so that the separation did not take place without much bickering and skirmishing to which Abbé Birotteau did his best to seem insensible.

Before the end of the first year that he passed beneath Mademoiselle Gamard's roof, the vicar had resumed his former habits; he passed two evenings in the week with Madame de Listomère, three with Mademoiselle Salomon, and the other two with Mademoiselle Merlin de la Blottière. These ladies belonged to the aristocratic portion of Tours society, to which Mademoiselle Gamard was not admitted. Wherefore the landlady was deeply outraged by Abbé Birotteau's desertion, which emphasized her unimportance: every sort of choice implies contempt for the object not chosen.

"Monsieur Birotteau didn't find us entertaining enough," said Abbé Troubert to the friends of Mademoiselle Gamard, when she was obliged to abandon her evening parties. "He's a man of wit, a high liver! He must have the best society, luxurious surroundings, sparkling conversation, the malicious gossip of the city."

These words invariably led Mademoiselle Gamard to vaunt her own excellent disposition at Birotteau's expense.

"He's not so very bright, after all," she would say. "If it hadn't been for Abbé Chapeloud, Madame de Listomère would never have received him. Oh! I lost a great deal when I lost Abbé Chapeloud. Such a pleasant man he was, and so easy to get along with! Why, in twelve long years I never had the slightest difficulty or the slightest disagreement with him."

Mademoiselle Gamard drew so unflattering a portrait of Abbé Birotteau, that her innocent lodger was looked upon in that bourgeois circle—secretly consumed with hatred for the aristocracy—as a man essentially ungracious and very uncomfortable to live with. For several weeks, the old maid had the pleasure of hearing herself commiserated by her friends, who, without believing a word of what they said, said to her from morning till night: "What, you, sweet and good as you are, arouse anyone's dislike?" or, "Don't mind it, dear Mademoiselle Gamard, you are so well known,"—etc., etc.

But in their hearts they all blessed the vicar, being enchanted to avoid an evening a week in the Cloister, the most deserted, the most gloomy, the most out-of-the-way corner of Tours.

Between persons who are constantly brought in contact with each other, hatred and affection never stand still; at every moment they find reasons for loving or hating each other more intensely. So it was that Abbé Birotteau became absolutely unendurable to Mademoiselle Gamard. Eighteen months after she first took him to board, when the silence of hatred seemed to the good man the tranquillity of contentment, and he was congratulating himself upon *having bound the old maid so securely*, to use his own expression, he was the object of a stealthy persecution and of a scheme of vengeance conceived in cold blood. The four vital incidents of the closed door, the forgotten slippers, the absence of fire and the candlestick taken to his own room, were of themselves enough to reveal to him the ominous hostility, whose final consequences were not to descend upon him until a time when they would be irreparable. As he fell asleep, the good vicar vainly cudgeled his brain—and he soon got to the bottom of it—in search of an explanation of Mademoiselle Gamard's discourteous conduct. In truth, as he had acted very logically in obeying the natural laws of his egotism, it was impossible for him to imagine the offences he had committed against his landlady.

If weighty concerns are simple of comprehension and easily expressed, the trivial incidents of life require many details. The events which constitute in a certain sense the prologue to this bourgeois drama, in which, however, the passions reach as great a height of violence as if they were aroused by momentous interests, demanded this long introduction, and it would have been a difficult matter for an accurate historian to compress its minute developments into a smaller compass.

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When he awoke the next morning, Birotteau's thoughts were so engrossed by his canonry that he had quite forgotten the four incidents of the preceding night, in which he had then discerned indications of a stormy future. The vicar was not the man to rise in a cold room; he rang to inform Marianne that he was awake and to summon her to his presence; as usual, he lay buried in the half-waking dreams, during which the maid was accustomed to kindle the fire, arousing him gently from this last nap by the hum of her questions and bustling about, a sort of music that he enjoyed. Half an hour elapsed and Marianne had not appeared. The vicar, half canon, was about to ring again, but dropped the cord when he heard a man's footstep on the stairs. A moment later, Abbé Troubert, having knocked discreetly at the door, entered in obedience to Birotteau's invitation. This visit, which the two abbés exchanged regularly every month, did not surprise Birotteau.

The canon at once expressed his surprise that Marianne had not yet lighted his quasi-colleague's fire. He opened a window, called to Marianne in a harsh voice, and bade her come at once to Birotteau's room; then he turned to his brother.

"If mademoiselle knew that you had no fire, she would scold Marianne," he said.

He proceeded to inquire concerning Birotteau's health, and asked him in a soft voice if he had any recent information leading him to hope to be appointed canon. The vicar explained the steps that had been taken and unsuspectingly told him who the persons were with whom Madame de Listomère was in correspondence, ignorant of the fact that Troubert had never been able to forgive that lady for refusing to admit him to her salon,—him, Abbé Troubert, who had already been twice suggested for vicar-general of the diocese.

It would be impossible to find two faces which presented so many points of contrast as those of the two abbés. Troubert was tall and thin, with a yellow, bilious complexion, while the vicar was what is familiarly called plump. Birotteau's round, ruddy face denoted witless good-nature, while the long deeply-wrinkled face of Troubert assumed at certain moments an expression overflowing with bitter irony or derision: but one must scrutinize it very carefully to detect those two sentiments. The canon's customary attitude was one of perfect calm, with his eyelids almost always lowered over a pair of orange-colored eyes, whose glance became keen and piercing at his bidding. Red hair added the finishing touch to this forbidding countenance, which was constantly obscured by the veil that serious meditation casts over the features. More than one person had at first believed him to be absorbed by profound and far-reaching ambition; but they who claimed to know him better had succeeded in overthrowing that opinion by arguing that he was crushed by Mademoiselle Gamard's despotism, or exhausted by too long fasts. He seldom spoke and never laughed. When it happened that he was pleasurably moved he indulged in a feeble smile, which lost itself among the folds of his face.

Birotteau, on the other hand, was all frankness, all expansiveness, was fond of good things, and took delight in trifles with the simplicity of a man entirely free from gall or malice. Abbé Troubert inspired at first sight an involuntary feeling of terror, whereas the sight of the vicar brought a kindly smile to everybody's lips. When the tall canon strode along under the arches of the nave of Saint-Gatien, with bent head and flashing eye, he compelled respect; his commanding figure harmonized with the yellow arches of the cathedral, the folds of his cassock had a monumental aspect, worthy of the sculptor. But the good vicar trotted up the aisle with no semblance of gravity or dignity, prancing up and down and at times apparently rolling over. And yet there was a resemblance between the two men. Just as Troubert's ambitious air, while causing people to respect him, had contributed perhaps to doom him to the insignificant rôle of a simple canon, so Birotteau's character and bearing seemed to mark him out as one destined to pass his life as vicar of the cathedral. However, Abbé Troubert, now fifty years of age, had, by his carefully measured conduct, by his apparent total lack of ambition, and by his saintly life, altogether dissipated the fears that his putative capacity and his forbidding exterior had inspired in his superiors. His health having become seriously impaired during the past year, his approaching elevation to the vicar-generalship of the archbishopric seemed probable. Even his rivals desired his appointment in order that they might have an opportunity to prepare more thoroughly for their own contest during the few days that he could hope to resist the attacks of a disease that had become chronic. Far from justifying similar hopes, Abbé Birotteau's triple chin presented to his rivals in the struggle for the canonry all the symptoms of robust health, and his gout seemed to them to convey an assurance of longevity, according to the proverb.

Abbé Chapeloud, a man of most excellent sense, whose affability caused him to be much sought after in the best society and by the leading men in the archbishopric, had always opposed, secretly and with much shrewdness, the elevation of Abbé Troubert; he had, too, very adroitly barred his access to all the salons in which the best society of Tours assembled, although Abbé Troubert treated him with great respect as long as he lived, and never failed to show him the utmost deference on all occasions. This constant submission did not avail, however, to change the opinion of the deceased canon, who said to Birotteau during the last walk they took together:

"Keep an eye on that tall, thin Troubert! He's a Sixtus Fifth reduced to the proportions of the bishopric."

Such was Mademoiselle Gamard's friend and favored lodger, who called upon Birotteau and lavished marks of friendship upon him on the morrow of the day on which she had, so to speak, declared war upon him.

"You must forgive Marianne," said the canon, as the maid entered the room. "I think she must have been with me this morning. My rooms are very damp and I coughed a great deal all the night long.—You're very comfortable here," he added, glancing at the cornices.

"Oh! I live like a canon," Birotteau replied with a smile.

"And I like a vicar," rejoined the humble priest.

"True, but you will soon take up your quarters at the archbishop's palace," said the good priest, who would have liked everybody to be happy.

"Oh! or in the cemetery. But may God's will be done!"

And Troubert looked up at the sky with a resigned expression.

"I came," he added, "to ask you to lend me the *Bishops' Register*. Yours is the only copy of the work in Tours."

"Go to the library and get it," replied Birotteau, reminded by the canon's last words of all the blessings of his life.

The tall canon went into the library and remained there while the vicar dressed. Soon, the breakfast bell rang, and the gouty vicar, reflecting that he would have had no fire to dress by, had it not been for Troubert's visit, said to himself:

"He's a good man!"

The two priests went down stairs together, each armed with a ponderous folio, which he placed on one of the consoles in the dining-room.

"What's all that?" demanded Mademoiselle Gamard sharply of Birotteau. "I hope you're not going to clutter up my dining-room with your old worm-eaten books."

"They're some books I need to use," replied Troubert. "Monsieur le Vicaire has kindly lent them to me."

"I might have guessed as much," said she with a disdainful smile. "Monsieur Birotteau doesn't often read those great books."

"How do you do this morning, mademoiselle?" queried the lodger in a soft voice.

"None too well," she replied dryly. "You waked me up during my first sleep last night, and I felt the effects all night long."

She took her seat at the table, adding:

"The milk is getting cold, messieurs."

Thunderstruck at this crabbed reception from his landlady, when he anticipated apologies, but alarmed, as timid people are wont to be, by the prospect of a discussion, especially when they are themselves the subject, the poor vicar took his seat in silence. Then, as he saw on Mademoiselle Gamard's face symptoms of apparent ill-humor, he maintained a constant warfare with his reason, which bade him not to put up with his landlady's lack of courtesy, while his nature led him to avoid a quarrel.

Suffering thus internally, Birotteau began by examining with great care the broad green bands painted on the coarse oiled silk which Mademoiselle Gamard had, from time immemorial, used as a tablecloth at breakfast, heedless of its frayed edges and numerous scars. The two boarders sat in cane-seated armchairs, facing each other, on each side of the great square table, the landlady sitting in the centre, where she overlooked everything from the vantage-ground of her chair with castors, well supplied with cushions and placed with its back to the dining-room stove. That room and the common salon were on the ground floor, immediately beneath Abbé Birotteau's bedroom and salon. When the vicar had received from Mademoiselle Gamard's hands his cup of coffee with sugar, he was congealed by the profound silence in which he was doomed to perform the usually lively function of eating his breakfast. He dared not look either at Troubert's expressionless face or at the old maid's threatening one, and so, to keep himself in countenance, he turned to the fat, unwieldy pug that lay on a cushion near the stove, never stirring, for he had always a little plate heaped with dainties on his left and on his right a cup of fresh water.

"Well, my dear," said he, "are you waiting for your coffee?"

This important personage—one of the most important in the house, although he made but little trouble, for he never barked and allowed his mistress to do all the talking—looked up at Birotteau with his little eyes, almost buried in the thick layers of fat about his chops, then slyly closed them again.

To understand the poor vicar's suffering, it is essential to say that, being endowed with loquacity as empty and resonant as a balloon, he maintained, although he had never been able to give the doctors a single reason for his opinion, that talk assisted digestion. Mademoiselle, who shared his belief in that hygienic doctrine, had never until recently failed, despite their lack of sympathy, to talk during meals; but for several mornings past the vicar had exerted his faculties to no purpose in framing artful questions designed to loosen her tongue. If the narrow limits within which this narrative is necessarily confined, had allowed us to report a single one of these conversations which almost always brought Abbé Troubert's bitter, sardonic smile to his lips, it would have presented a finished picture of the Bœotian life of the provinces. Some intelligent people might perhaps take pleasure in following the curious development of Abbé Birotteau's and Mademoiselle Gamard's political, religious and literary opinions. Most assuredly there would be a comic side to their portrayal: for example, the reasons they put forward, in 1826, for entertaining grave doubts as to the death of Napoléon; or the

BREAKFAST AT MADEMOISELLE GAMARD'S

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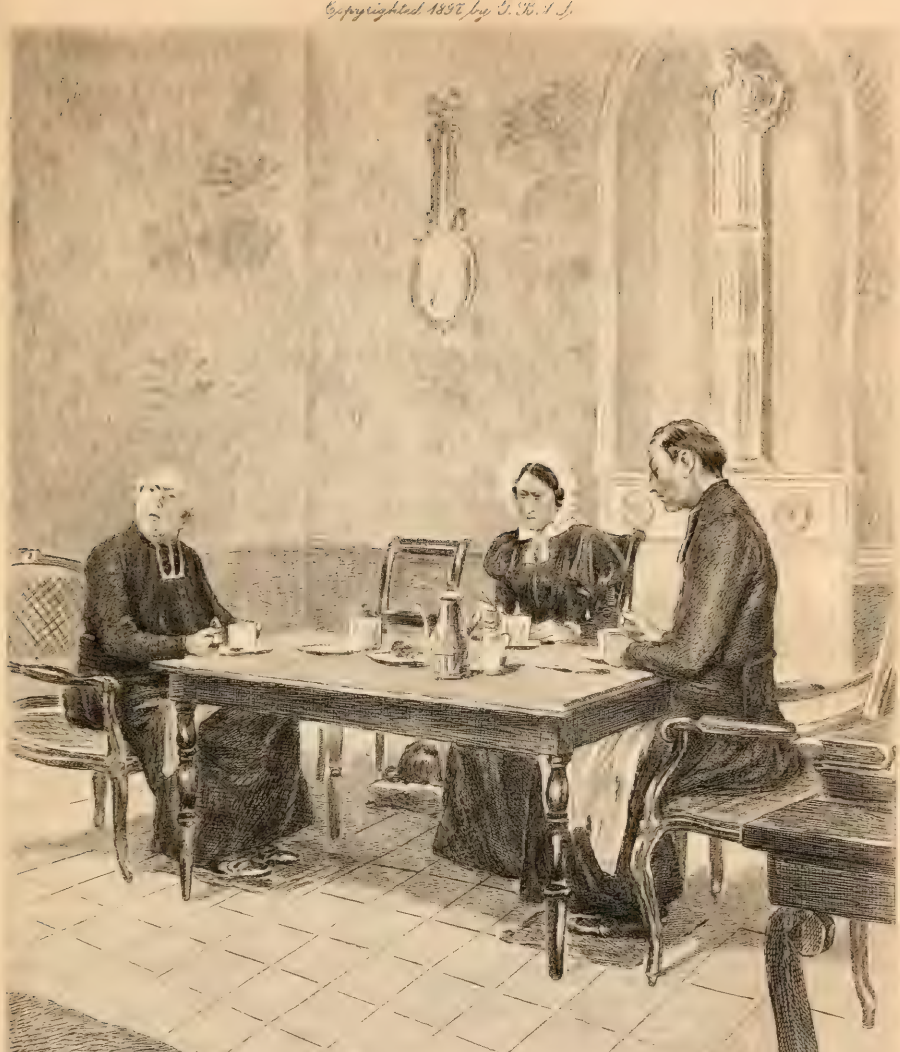
AL. BOILOT SC.
Pierre VIDAL

conjectures which made them believe that Louis XVII. was not dead, but had made his escape in a hollow log. Who would not have laughed to hear them demonstrating, by arguments evidently of their own invention, that the king of France alone had the right to dispose of all taxes, that the Chambers had assembled to destroy the clergy, that more than thirteen hundred thousand persons perished on the scaffold during the Revolution? Then they talked about the press, without any idea of the number of newspapers or of the real nature of that modern invention. Monsieur Birotteau listened attentively to Mademoiselle Gamard, when she said that a man who ate an egg every morning would inevitably die before the end of the year, and that that had been proved; that a small, light roll eaten every morning for several days, without drink, would cure the sciatica; that all the workmen who assisted in demolishing the Abbey of Saint-Martin died within six months; that a certain prefect, under Bonaparte, had done his utmost to ruin the towers of Saint-Gatien; and a thousand other absurd tales.

But at that moment Birotteau felt as if his tongue were paralyzed, so he resigned himself to eat without attempting conversation. He soon remembered, however, that silence was dangerous for his stomach, and he said boldly:

"This is excellent coffee!"

But this bold stroke was entirely vain. After glancing at the sky through the small space between the two black buttresses of Saint-Gatien over the garden, once more the vicar mustered courage to say:

"It will be pleasanter to-day than it was yesterday—"

At this remark, Mademoiselle Gamard contented herself by bestowing one of her most gracious glances upon Abbé Troubert, then turned her eyes, flashing with terrible severity, upon Birotteau, who fortunately had lowered his.

No human being of the gentler sex was more perfectly adapted than Mademoiselle Sophie Gamard to summarize the elegiac nature of an old maid; but, in order to depict a being whose character adds an immense interest to the minor incidents of this drama, and to the anterior life of the persons who take part therein, perhaps it will be well to sum up here the ideas whose expression is found in the old maid: the every-day life forms the mind and the mind forms the features.

If everything in society, as in the world at large, must have an end, there are certainly some lives here on earth whose end and utility are inexplicable. Moral and political economy alike reject the individual who consumes without producing, who occupies a certain amount of space on earth without diffusing either good or evil about him; for evil is unquestionably a good whose results are not immediately manifest. It rarely happens that old maids do not voluntarily take their places in this class of unproductive beings. Now, if the consciousness of work well done affords the person who does it a feeling of satisfaction that assists him to endure the trials of life, the certainty of being a burden to some other person or of being absolutely useless, should produce a contrary effect, and arouse in the good-for-naught the self-contempt that he arouses in others. This stern social reprobation is one of the causes that contribute to implant in an old maid's mind, without her knowledge, the dissatisfaction that her face expresses. A prejudice, in which there is some justice, casts discredit everywhere, and in France more than anywhere else, upon the woman with whom nobody has sought to share the blessings or endure the ills of life. Now, there comes a time in the lives of unmarried women when the world, rightly or wrongly, condemns them because of the contempt universally entertained for them. If they are ugly, their amiable dispositions should have atoned for the imperfections of nature; if they are pretty, their ill-luck must be based upon very grave reasons. One cannot say which of the two is the more worthy of contempt. If their celibacy is deliberate, if they have taken a vow to remain free, neither men nor mothers forgive them for having proved false to the natural devotion of woman by refusing to yield to the passions that render their sex so touching: to renounce one's suffering is to abdicate all claim to a poetic nature, and to be unworthy of the sweet words of consolation to which a mother's right is always incontestable.

Again, the generous sentiments, the exquisite qualities of woman are developed only by their constant exercise; by remaining unmarried, a being of the female sex becomes simply a nonentity: she is cold and selfish and horrifies one. This implacable decree is unluckily too just for old maids not to understand the grounds upon which it is based. These ideas take root in their hearts as naturally as the effects of their gloomy lives are reproduced in their features. They wither and fade, because the constant overflowing of the heart, the happiness that casts a bloom upon the faces of other women and imparts such gentle grace to their movements, has never existed in them. Then they become sour and disappointed, because any person who has missed his vocation is unhappy; he suffers, and suffering engenders malevolence. In truth, an old maid always blames the world for her isolation for a long while before she blames herself therefor. From the accusation to a longing for vengeance is but a single step. Moreover, the ill grace manifest throughout their persons is a necessary result of their lives. Having never felt the need of pleasing others, refinement and good taste are unknown to them. They see these qualities only in themselves. That fact leads them instinctively to choose the things that are convenient to them, to the neglect of those that may be agreeable to another. Without seeking to understand the difference between themselves and other women, they detect it at last and suffer because of it. Jealousy is an ineradicable sentiment in female hearts. Old maids therefore are jealous in their nothingness, and know only the misery of the single passion that men forgive in the fair sex, because it flatters them. Thus, tortured in all their desires, obliged to resist the developments of their natures, old maids are always subject to an internal constraint to which they never succeed in accustoming themselves. Is it not hard at any age, especially for a woman, to read upon every face a feeling of repulsion, when it should be her destiny to arouse none but pleasant sensations in the hearts of all who approach her? So it is that an old maid's glance is always sidelong, less through modesty, than through fear and shame. They never forgive society for their false position, because they never forgive themselves. Now, it is impossible for a person who is constantly at war with herself, or at odds with life, to leave others in peace and not to envy their happiness.

This multitude of depressing ideas were all present in the lustreless gray eyes of Mademoiselle Gamard, and the broad black rings that surrounded them betrayed the long conflicts of her solitary life. All the wrinkles on her face were straight. The frame of her forehead, her skull and her cheek bones was rigid and harsh. She allowed the scattered gray hairs to grow upon her chin, with perfect indifference. Her thin lips barely covered her unpleasantly long teeth, which did not lack whiteness. She was naturally dark, and her hair, once black, had been whitened by frightful sick-headaches. This mishap compelled her to wear false hair, but as she did not know how to adjust it so as to conceal the line of demarcation, there were often narrow interstices between the rim of her cap and the black cord that held this badly curled half-wig in place. Her dress—taffeta in summer, merino in winter, but always a carmelite brown—was drawn a little too tightly about her ungraceful figure and her thin arms. Her collarette, which was constantly turned aside, disclosed a neck, whose coarse red skin was as artistically striped as an oak leaf with the sun shining through it. Her origin explained the defects of her figure. She was the daughter of a dealer in wood, a sort of *parvenu* peasant. At eighteen, she might have been fresh and plump, but no trace remained of the white complexion or pretty coloring that she boasted that she once had. Her flesh had taken on the pale hue common among devotees.

Her aquiline nose was the one feature that contributed most to express the despotism of her ideas, just as her flattened brow betrayed her narrow-mindedness. Her movements had a peculiar abruptness that deprived them of all grace; and simply from seeing her take her handkerchief from her bag and blow her nose with a great noise, you could have divined her character and her manners. She was of medium height and carried herself very erect, justifying the observation of a naturalist who has explained, physically, the gait of all old maids by maintaining that their joints are soldered. When she walked, the movement was not distributed equally through her whole body so as to produce the undulations that are so graceful and attractive in most women; she moved, so to speak, in a single piece, seeming to rise from the ground at every step like the statue of the Commander. In her moments of good humor she would give you to understand, as all old maids do, that she might have been married, but that, luckily for her, she discovered her lover's bad faith in time; and in this way she would, unwittingly, bring suit against her heart in favor of her calculating instinct.

This typical figure of the genus *old maid* was suitably framed by the grotesque fancies of a varnished paper representing Turkish landscapes, with which the dining-room walls were hung. Mademoiselle Gamard usually sat in that room, which was embellished with two consoles and a barometer. At the place allotted to each abbé was a little cushion covered with tapestry, of which the colors were sadly faded. The common salon in which she received her guests was worthy of her. Its aspect will readily be imagined if we call attention to the fact that it was called the *yellow salon;* the draperies were yellow, the furniture and paper yellow; on the mantel-piece, surmounted by a mirror with a gilt frame, glass candlesticks and a glass clock reflected the light in a fashion very trying to the eyes. As to Mademoiselle Gamard's private apartment, no one had ever been allowed to enter there. One could only conjecture that it was filled with odds and ends of wornout furniture, with the rags and tatters, so to speak, with which old maids surround themselves, and by which they set so great store.

Such was the person who was destined to exercise a far-reaching influence upon Abbé Birotteau's last days.

As she lacked means of exerting, according to the designs of nature, the activity with which all women are endowed, and as she was compelled by necessity to expend it in some direction, the old maid carried it into paltry intrigues, provincial tittle-tattle, and the selfish combinations with which all old maids eventually occupy themselves to the exclusion of all else. Birotteau, to his undoing, had developed in Sophie Gamard the only sentiment it was possible for that poor creature to feel—hatred; which had hitherto lain dormant by reason of the calmness and monotony of provincial life, whose horizon was even more restricted for her than for others; but which was destined to acquire the greater intensity because it was to be brought into play within narrow limits and in connection with trivial matters. Birotteau was one of those people who are predestined to suffer everything, because they can see nothing and therefore can avoid nothing; everything happens to them.

"Yes, it will be a fine day," said the canon after a pause, apparently emerging from a reverie and desiring to obey the rules of courtesy.

Birotteau, dismayed at the time that elapsed between the question and answer—for he had swallowed his coffee without speaking, for the first time in his life—left the dining-room, where his heart was as oppressed as if it were in a vice. Feeling that his cup of coffee lay heavy on his stomach, he went out into the garden and paced sadly around the little narrow box-bordered paths laid out in the shape of a star. But when he returned, after his first circuit, he saw Mademoiselle Gamard and Abbé Troubert standing silently in the doorway of the salon: he, with arms folded and motionless as the statue on a tomb; she, leaning against the shutter-door. Both seemed to be counting his steps as they gazed at him. Nothing is more embarrassing to a naturally timid mortal, than to be the object of a close scrutiny; but, if it is made by the eyes of hate, the suffering that it causes changes into intolerable martyrdom. Soon it occurred to Birotteau that he was probably preventing Mademoiselle Gamard and the canon from walking. This idea, inspired by fear and by good-nature at once, became intensified and made him abandon the field. He left the garden, thinking no more of his canonry, he was so engrossed by the old maid's desolating tyranny. It happened, luckily for him, that he found much to occupy him at Saint-Gatien, where there were several burials, a wedding and two baptisms. He was able therefore to forget his woes. When his stomach announced the approach of the dinner-hour, he drew his watch and was terrified to see that it was some minutes after four. Well he knew Mademoiselle Gamard's punctuality, and he hastened back to the house.

He glanced into the kitchen and saw that the first course had been removed. When he reached the dining-room, the old maid said to him in a tone wherein reproach and delight at finding her lodger at fault were equally blended:

"It's half-past four, Monsieur Birotteau. You know that we never wait."

The vicar glanced at the clock on the mantel-piece, and the position of the gauze covering intended to shelter it from the dust proved to him that the landlady had wound it up during the forenoon and had given herself the pleasure of setting it ahead of the clock of Saint-Gatien's. There was nothing to be said. The expression in words of the suspicion conceived by the vicar would have called forth the most awful and the most justifiable of the eloquent explosions which Mademoiselle Gamard, like all women of her class, could produce on such occasions.

The thousand and one petty annoyances which a servant can compel her master to submit to, or a wife her husband, in small domestic matters, were all divined by Mademoiselle Gamard, who overwhelmed her lodger with them. The delight with which she wove her conspiracies against the poor priest's domestic happiness bore the imprint of the most malicious genius. She so arranged matters that she never appeared to be in the wrong.

*

A week subsequent to the period at which this narrative begins, the general atmosphere of the house and Birotteau's relations with Mademoiselle Gamard revealed to him a plot that had been brewing for six months past. So long as the old maid had sought revenge stealthily, and the vicar had been able to blind himself wilfully to the truth, by refusing to believe in the malevolence of her intentions, the moral wrong had made little impression upon him. But since the affair of the candlestick and the setting ahead of the clock, Birotteau could no longer doubt that he was living under the ban of a hatred that had one eye always glaring at him. He was driven to despair when he saw Mademoiselle Gamard's sharp, hooked fingers ready at any moment to bury themselves in his heart. Well content to feed upon a sentiment as fertile in emotions as that of vengeance, the old maid took delight in hovering over the vicar and tearing him to pieces as a bird of prey hovers over and rends a field-mouse before devouring it. She had long since formed a scheme which the down-trodden priest could not possibly suspect, and which she was not slow to put in force, displaying the genius that people who lead solitary lives are so apt to display in trivial matters—people whose minds, ill adapted to appreciate the grandeur of true piety, busy themselves with the petty details of religion.

Lastly,—and it was a terrible aggravation of his suffering!—the nature of his trouble forbade Birotteau, who was naturally an expansive creature and loved to be pitied and consoled, the slight consolation of talking about it to his friends. The small amount of tact that he owed to his timidity made him fear to seem ridiculous for worrying over such absurd trifles. And yet these same trifles made up his whole existence, his dear existence, filled with business about nothing and nothings in the guise of business; a dull, colorless existence, in which overstrong sentiments were calamities, in which the absence of all emotion was a blessing. Thus the poor priest's paradise was suddenly transformed into a hell. His suffering finally became intolerable. The terror caused by the thought of an explanation with Mademoiselle Gamard increased from day to day, and the secret misery that poisoned his declining days had a disastrous effect on his health. One morning, as he was drawing on his blue-figured stockings, he detected a loss of eight lines in the circumference of his calf. Aghast at this heartbreaking, unmistakable symptom, he determined to approach Abbé Troubert and beg him to make his peace with Mademoiselle Gamard.

When he found himself face to face with the imposing canon, who in order to receive him in a scantily furnished room, quickly left the study, filled with papers, in which he was always at work, and to which no one was admitted, the vicar was almost ashamed to speak of Mademoiselle Gamard's petty persecutions to a man who seemed to him so engrossed with serious subjects. But, after he had undergone all the agony of internal deliberation, which bashful, hesitating or weak-minded people feel in connection with unimportant matters, he decided, not without an extraordinary fluttering of the heart, to explain his position to Abbé Troubert. The canon listened with a cold, grave face, trying, but in vain, to repress an occasional smile, which might perhaps have revealed to observant eyes a feeling of inward satisfaction. Flames seemed to dart from beneath his lowered lids when Birotteau described with the eloquence born of real feeling, the bitter draught that was constantly held to his lips; but Troubert placed his hand over his eyes with a gesture frequently resorted to by thinkers, and maintained his usual dignified attitude. When the vicar had ceased to speak, he would have been sadly puzzled if he had attempted to discover upon Troubert's face, then covered with spots of a still deeper yellow than the ordinary shade of his complexion, any traces of the feelings he had aroused in that mysterious priest's mind. After a moment's silence, the canon made one of those replies every word of which needs to be studied long and carefully in order that its full bearing may be understood, but which, at a later period, proved to thoughtful people the amazing profundity of his mind and the power of his intelligence. In a word, he overwhelmed

Birotteau by saying to him that the things he had heard astonished him the more because he should never have noticed them except for his brother's confession; he attributed this lack of perception to his engrossing occupations, his constant toil, and the tyranny of certain lofty thoughts which held his mind away from the details of life. He reminded him, but without seeming to presume to censure the conduct of a man whose age and attainments commanded his respect, that, "in the old days, recluses paid but little heed to food or shelter, in the solitudes where they gave themselves over to holy contemplation," and that, "in our days the priest might, in thought, create a solitude for himself in any place." Then reverting to Birotteau's affairs, he added that, "such disputes were entirely novel to him. In twelve years nothing of the sort had ever occurred between Mademoiselle Gamard and the venerable Abbé Chapeloud." As for himself, he added, doubtless he might properly consent to act as arbiter between the vicar and their landlady, because his friendship for her did not go beyond the limits imposed by the laws of the Church upon its faithful servants; but, in that case, justice required that he should also hear Mademoiselle Gamard's story. Moreover, he said, that he could see no change in her, that she had always been like that; that he had readily submitted to some of her whims, knowing that the worthy creature was the personification of kindness and gentleness; that any slight uncertainties of temper must be attributed to the suffering caused by a pulmonary trouble, which she never mentioned, and to which she was resigned, like a true Christian. He ended by saying to the vicar that, "if he should remain a few more years with mademoiselle, he would learn to appreciate her more thoroughly and to understand the treasures of that estimable character."

Abbé Birroteau left the room in confusion. In the fatal necessity to which he was reduced of taking counsel of himself alone, he judged Mademoiselle Gamard by himself. The good man believed that by absenting himself for a few days, he could extinguish, for lack of fuel to feed upon, the hatred the old maid bore him. Therefore he determined to renew an old custom and go to pass a few days at a country seat of Madame de Listomère, which she was accustomed to visit toward the close of the autumn, a season when the skies are usually clear and soft in Touraine. Poor man! he did precisely what his redoubtable foe, whose projects could be defeated only by the patience of a monk, secretly hoped that he would do; but as he suspected nothing, as he did not know how to manage his own affairs, he was fated to fall, like a lamb, beneath the butcher's first blow.

Situated on the southern slope of the rising ground between the city of Tours and the heights of Saint-Georges, Madame de Listomère's property, surrounded by cliffs, combined all the charms of the country with the diversions of the city. In ten minutes one could drive from the bridge of Tours to the entrance to this estate, which was called *L'Alouette:* an inestimable advantage in a country where no one is willing to put himself out for any purpose, not even in search of entertainment. Abbé Birotteau had been at L'Alouette about ten days, when the concierge informed him one morning, just at breakfast time, that Monsieur Caron wished to speak with him. Monsieur Caron was an advocate who attended to Mademoiselle Gamard's legal business. Birotteau, unmindful of that fact and unaware of any possible ground for litigation with anyone on earth, left the table in some anxiety, to obey the advocate's summons; he found him seated modestly on the rail of a terrace.

"As your purpose not to board any longer with Mademoiselle Gamard has become clear—" began the man of business.

"What! monsieur," Abbé Birotteau interrupted, "I have never thought of leaving her."

"But, monsieur," rejoined the advocate, "you must have had some understanding on that point with Mademoiselle Gamard, as she has sent me to find out if you propose to remain long in the country. The case of a long absence was not provided for in your agreement, and may give rise to some controversy. Now, Mademoiselle Gamard understands that your board—"

"Monsieur," said Birotteau in surprise, interrupting the advocate once more, "I did not suppose it was necessary to resort to something very like legal measures to—"

"Mademoiselle Gamard, who desires to provide against any possible difficulty," said Monsieur Caron, "has sent me to come to an understanding with you."

"Very well, if you will be kind enough to return to-morrow," replied Birotteau, "I will have consulted counsel."

"Very good," said Caron, saluting him.

And the limb of the law departed. The poor vicar, dismayed by the persistence with which Mademoiselle Gamard dogged his steps, returned to Madame de Listomère's dining-room with a woebegone face, which caused everyone to ask:

"What in the world has happened to you, Monsieur Birotteau?"

The abbé dejectedly resumed his seat without replying, so oppressed was he by vague forebodings of disaster. But, after breakfast, when several of his friends were assembled in the salon in front of a good fire, Birotteau artlessly told them his experience in detail. His auditors, who were beginning to be bored by life in the country, took a keen interest in the intrigue, so thoroughly in harmony with provincial manners. Everyone took the abbé's part against the old maid.

"Why, can't you see," said Madame de Listomère, "that Abbé Troubert has his eye on your apartments?"

At this point the historian would be rightfully entitled to draw this lady's portrait; but it has seemed to him that nobody, even those to whom

Sterne's system of *cognomology* is unknown, can pronounce the three words: MADAME DE LISTOMÈRE, without forming a mental picture of the noble dignified dame, tempering the rigors of piety with the old-fashioned elegance and polished manners of the monarchical and classic régime; kindly, but a little stiff; with a slight nasal accent; permitting herself to read *La Nouvelle Héloïse* and the latest comedy, and still wearing her own hair.

"Abbé Birotteau must not give way to that old meddling busybody!" cried Monsieur de Listomère, a lieutenant in the navy on leave, visiting his aunt. "If the vicar has any pluck and will follow my advice, it won't be long before he has regained his tranquillity."

Thereupon everyone set about analyzing Mademoiselle Gamard's acts, with the perspicacity peculiar to provincials, who cannot be denied the talent of laying bare the most secret motives of human actions.

"You're on the wrong scent," said an old landowner, who knew the province thoroughly. "There's something serious under all this, that I don't grasp yet. Abbé Troubert is too deep to be found out so soon. Our dear Birotteau is only at the beginning of his troubles. In the first place, will he be left in peace even if he gives up his apartment to Troubert? I doubt it.—If Caron came out here," he added, turning to the bewildered priest, "to tell you that you intended to leave Mademoiselle Gamard, there can be no doubt that

Mademoiselle Gamard intends that you shall leave her.—In that case, out you'll go, willing or unwilling. Those people never take any chances and play only a sure game."

This old gentleman, Monsieur de Bourbonne by name, summed up all the ideas of the province as completely as Voltaire summed up the spirit of his time. A thin, dried-up old man, he affected in matters of dress the indifference of a landed proprietor whose territorial wealth is proverbial throughout the department. His face, tanned by the ardent sun of Touraine, was less intellectual than shrewd. Accustomed to weigh his words, to calculate the probable effect of his acts, he concealed his profound circumspection beneath a deceitful appearance of simplicity. So it hardly need be said that, like a Norman peasant, he always had the advantage in all business matters. He was an authority in wine-producing, the favorite science of the Tourainians. He had succeeded in rounding out the meadows belonging to one of his estates, at the expense of the alluvial lands of the Loire, avoiding all litigation with the State. This achievement procured for him the reputation of a man of talent. If, fascinated by Monsieur de Bourbonne's conversation, you had asked some Tourainian for his biography: "Oh! he's an *old rogue!*" would have been the conventional reply of all those who were jealous of him, and there were many such. In Touraine, as in most provinces, jealousy forms *the root of the tongue*.

Monsieur de Bourbonne's remark was followed by a pause, during which the persons who composed this little committee seemed to reflect. At this juncture, Mademoiselle Salomon de Villenoix was announced. She had came from Tours, impelled by her desire to be of service to Birotteau, and the news she brought changed the face of affairs completely. When she arrived, every one, except the old landowner, was advising Birotteau to enter the lists against Troubert and Gamard, under the auspices of the aristocratic society of Tours, which would take him under its wing.

"The vicar-general, to whom all matters relating to appointments are referred," said Mademoiselle Salomon, "has been taken sick, and the archbishop has empowered Abbé Troubert to act in his place. So that the appointment to the canonry rests entirely with him. Now, yesterday, at Mademoiselle de Blottière's, Abbé Poirel spoke of the annoyance Abbé Birotteau was causing Mademoiselle Gamard, evidently intending to justify beforehand the disgrace that is to fall upon our dear abbé. 'Abbé Chapeloud was very necessary to Abbé Birotteau,' said he, 'and since that virtuous canon's death, it has been shown that—' Conjectures and calumnies followed in rapid succession. You understand?"

"Troubert will be vicar-general," said Monsieur de Bourbonne solemnly.

"Let us see!" cried Madame de Listomère, turning to Birotteau; "which do you prefer, to be canon, or to stay with Mademoiselle Gamard?"

"To be canon!" was the general response.

"Very well, then," continued Madame de Listomère, "we must let Abbé Troubert and Mademoiselle Gamard win the case. By sending Monsieur Caron here, did they not say, indirectly, that if you would agree to leave them, you should be canon? Give and take!"

Everyone applauded Madame de Listomère's tact and sagacity, except her nephew, Baron de Listomère, who said, in a whimsical tone, to Monsieur de Bourbonne:

"I'd have liked to see the fight between the *Gamard* and the *Birotteau!*"

But, unluckily for the vicar, his friends in society did not contend on equal terms with the old maid supported by Abbé Troubert. The time soon came when battle was openly joined, and the conflict broadened and assumed enormous proportions. Upon the advice of Madame de Listomère and the majority of her adherents, who began to take a passionate interest in this intrigue that made such a welcome break in the emptiness of their provincial lives, a servant was despatched to Monsieur Caron. The advocate returned with astonishing celerity, which, however, alarmed no one save Monsieur de Bourbonne.

"Let us postpone our decision until we have more ample information," was the advice of that Fabius in dressing-gown and slippers, whose profound reflections revealed to him the far-reaching combinations on the Touraine chessboard.

He attempted to enlighten Birotteau as to the dangers of his position. But the *old rogue's* wisdom did not accord with the passions of the moment and but little attention was paid to him.

The conference between Birotteau and the lawyer was of short duration. The vicar returned to the salon in dire dismay.

"He wants me to give a written paper declaring my *withdrawal.*"

"What's that ominous word?" queried the lieutenant.

"What does that mean?" cried Madame de Listomère.

"It means simply that the abbé is to declare in writing his purpose to leave Mademoiselle Gamard's house," replied Monsieur de Bourbonne, taking a pinch of snuff.

"Is that all? Sign it then!" said Madame de Listomère, looking at Birotteau. "If you have really decided to leave her house, there is no harm in declaring your will."

Birotteau's will!

"That is true," said Monsieur de Bourbonne, closing his snuff-box with an abrupt movement whose significance it is impossible to describe, for it was a whole language in itself. "But it's always dangerous to write," he added, laying his snuff-box on the mantel-piece with an air that terrified the vicar.

Birotteau was so completely bewildered by the overturning of all his ideas, by the rapid succession of events that took him by surprise and without means of defence, by the unconcern with which his friends discussed the matters dearest to his heart in his solitary life, that he stood motionless, as if lost in the moon, thinking of nothing, but listening and trying to understand the meaning of the words that came pouring from everybody's mouth. He took the paper brought by Monsieur Caron and read it, as if he were about to concentrate his attention upon the advocate's document; but it was a mechanical movement. And so he signed the paper by which he acknowledged that he voluntarily relinquished his domicile at Mademoiselle Gamard's, as well as the right to be boarded there, according to their agreement.

When the vicar had affixed his signature, Monsieur Caron took the document and asked him where his client should send the things that belonged to him. Birotteau told him to send them to Madame de Listomère's house. That lady, with an inclination of the head, consented to receive the abbé for a few days, not doubting that he would soon be appointed canon.

The old landowner asked to be allowed to see the act of renunciation, if it may be so called, and Monsieur Caron handed it to him.

"Aha! so there's a written agreement between you and Mademoiselle Gamard?" he said to the vicar after he had read it; "where is it? what are its provisions?"

"The document is at my rooms," said Birotteau.

"Do you know its tenor?" Monsieur de Bourbonne asked the advocate.

"No, monsieur," said Caron, putting out his hand for the fatal paper.

"Ah!" said the old landowner to himself, "of course you know every word there is in that paper; but you're not paid to tell us."

And he returned the document to the lawyer.

"Where am I going to put all my furniture?" cried Birotteau, "and my books, my beautiful bookcase, my fine pictures, my red salon, everything?"

There was something so ingenuous in the poor man's despair at finding himself thus uprooted, so to speak; it expressed so perfectly the purity of his morals, his ignorance of worldly affairs, that Madame de Listomère and Mademoiselle Salomon said to him to comfort him, assuming the tone employed by mothers when they promise their children a toy:

"Are you going to worry about such trifles as that? Why we will find you a house warmer and lighter than Mademoiselle Gamard's. If we can't find any lodgings that suit you, why, one of us will take you to board. Come, let us have a game of backgammon. To-morrow you must go and see Abbé Troubert and ask for his support, and you'll see how well he'll receive you!"

Weak people are reassured as easily as they are frightened. And so poor Birotteau, enchanted at the prospect of living with Madame de Listomère, forgot the irremediable destruction of the happiness he had so long craved, and so thoroughly enjoyed.

But at night, before he fell asleep, he cudgeled his brains, with the distress of a man to whom the turmoil of moving and forming new habits are like the end of the world, to think where he could find so convenient a place for his bookcase as that gallery of his. As he pictured his books wandering from place to place, his furniture wrenched and broken, his whole establishment in disorder, he asked himself a thousand times why his first year at Mademoiselle Gamard's had been so pleasant, and the second so intolerable. And his experience always proved to be a bottomless well, in which his reason floundered helplessly about. The canonry no longer seemed to him a sufficient recompense for so much misery; he compared his life to a stocking, the whole woof of which unravels if a single thread is dropped. Mademoiselle Salomon still clung to him. But, when all his old illusions were slipping away from him, the poor priest dared not believe in a recent friendship.

In the *città dolente* of old maids, we fall in with many, especially in France, whose lives are a sacrifice nobly offered up every day to noble sentiments. Some proudly remain faithful to a heart that death has prematurely snatched from them; martyrs to love, they discover the secret of being wives at heart. Others obey family pride, which, to our shame, is growing less every day, and devote their lives to advancing the fortunes of a brother or of orphan nephews: these really make mothers of themselves though they remain virgins. Such old maids attain the loftiest heroism possible to their sex, by consecrating all the feminine sentiments to the worship of misfortune. They idealize the figure of woman by renouncing the compensations of her destiny and accepting only its trials. They live amid the splendor of their devotion and men bow respectfully before their wrinkled features. Mademoiselle de Sombreuil was neither wife nor maid; she was and always will be a living poem. Mademoiselle Salomon was one of those heroic creatures. Her devotion was sublime in that it was destined to bring her no glory, after it had been a constant cause of suffering to her. When she was young and beautiful, she loved and was loved; her lover lost his reason. For five years, with the courage born of love, she devoted herself to the mere mechanical happiness of the unfortunate youth, whose madness she espoused so completely that he did not seem mad to her. She was a simple-mannered, plain-spoken person, and her pale face did not lack character, notwithstanding the regularity of her features. She never spoke of her past life. But sometimes the sudden starts that escaped her when she heard the story of a sad or harrowing experience, revealed the noble qualities engendered by great sorrows. She had come to Tours to live after losing the companion of her youth. She was not appreciated there at her true worth, and was considered a *good sort of person*. She did much good and attached herself, by preference, to weak creatures. As one in that category, the vicar had naturally aroused her deep interest.

Mademoiselle Salomon, who returned to the city in the morning, took Birotteau along and set him down upon Quai de la Cathédrale, leaving him to walk to the Cloister, where he was in great haste to arrive in order to save the canonry at least from the shipwreck and to superintend the removal of his furniture. Not without a violent palpitation of the heart did he ring at the door of that house, where he had been a constant visitor for fourteen years, where he had lived, and from which he was to be banished forever, after dreaming of dying there in peace as his friend Chapeloud had done.

Marianne seemed surprised to see the vicar. He told her that he had come to speak to Abbé Troubert, and started toward the canon's rooms on the ground floor; but Marianne called out:

"Abbé Troubert isn't there now, Monsieur le Vicaire; he's in your old rooms."

These words gave the vicar a terrible shock, for he at last understood Troubert's character and the thoroughness of a scheme of revenge so cautiously matured, when he found him at home in Chapeloud's library, sitting in Chapeloud's handsome Gothic armchair, sleeping in Chapeloud's bed, of course, reveling in Chapeloud's furniture, lodged in Chapeloud's heart, annulling Chapeloud's will, and, in a word, defrauding of his inheritance the friend of Chapeloud—of Chapeloud who had kept him penned up at Mademoiselle Gamard's so many years by interfering with his advancement and by closing all the salons of Tours to him. By what magic wand was this metamorphosis accomplished? Did all these things no longer belong to Birotteau? Certain it is that, when he saw the sardonic expression with which Troubert looked around upon the library and its contents, poor Birotteau concluded that the future vicar-general was sure in his own mind of possessing the spoils of those whom he had hated so vindictively, Chapeloud as an enemy, and Birotteau, because Chapeloud lived again in him. A thousand thoughts rushed through the good man's mind at the sight, and plunged him into a sort of dream. He stood like a statue, apparently fascinated by Troubert's eyes, which were fastened upon his face.

"I do not suppose, monsieur," said Birotteau at last, "that you purpose to deprive me of the things that belong to me. If Mademoiselle Gamard was impatient to provide you with more comfortable apartments, she ought to have had the fairness to give me time to put my books together and take away my furniture."

"Monsieur," said Abbé Troubert coldly, allowing no sign of emotion to appear upon his face, "Mademoiselle Gamard informed me yesterday of your departure, the reason for which is unknown to me. She transferred me to these rooms only because she was obliged to do so. Monsieur l'Abbé Poirel has taken my apartment. I am not able to say whether the things in these rooms belong to mademoiselle or not; but if they are yours, surely you cannot doubt her good faith; the sanctity of her life is a guaranty of her uprightness. As for myself, you know how simple my habits are. I have slept for fifteen years in a room with bare walls, heedless of the dampness, which will prove to have been the death of me. However, if you wish to occupy this apartment again, I will gladly give it up to you."

Upon hearing those ominous words, Birotteau entirely forgot the matter of the canonry; he hurried downstairs with the activity of a young man, in search of Mademoiselle Gamard, and found her at the foot of the stairs, on the broad tiled landing that connected the two portions of the house.

"Mademoiselle," he said, raising his hat, heedless of the bitter, mocking smile upon her lips and of the fierce flame that gave to her eyes the brilliancy of a tiger's, "I cannot understand why you did not wait until I had removed my furniture, before—"

"What!" she exclaimed, cutting him short, "haven't all your effects been carried to Madame de Listomère's?"

"But my furniture and books?"

"Haven't you read your agreement, then?" said the old maid, in a tone that must be written upon ruled music paper in order to convey an idea of the way in which hatred shaded the accentuation of each word.

And Mademoiselle Gamard seemed to grow taller; her eyes shone brighter, her face expanded, and her whole body quivered with delight. Abbé Troubert opened a window in order to be able to read a large folio volume with greater ease. Birotteau stood as if he were rooted to the spot, while Mademoiselle Gamard trumpeted into his ears, in a voice as clear as the notes of a bugle, the following words:

"Wasn't it agreed that, if you left my house, your furniture should belong to me, to indemnify me for the difference between the price of your board and lodging and good Abbé Chapeloud's? Now, as Monsieur l'Abbé Poirel has been appointed canon—"

At her last words, Birotteau bowed feebly, as if to take leave of the old maid, then he rushed precipitately from the house. He was afraid that he should fall in a swoon if he remained there longer, and thus afford his implacable enemies too signal a triumph. Walking through the streets like a drunken man, he at last reached Madame de Listomère's house, and found there, in one of the lower rooms, his clothes, his linen and his papers, in a single trunk. At sight of these poor relics of his belongings, the unfortunate priest sat down and covered his face with his hands to hide his tears from the servants.

Abbé Poirel was appointed canon! Birotteau was left without shelter, without money, without furniture! Luckily Mademoiselle Salomon drove by. The concierge, who realized the poor man's despair, signaled the coachman. After a few words had been exchanged between the old maid and the concierge, the vicar allowed himself to be led, half-dead, to his faithful friend, to whom he could say naught but a few incoherent words.

Mademoiselle Salomon, terrified by the momentary derangement of so feeble a brain, drove him at once to L'Alouette, attributing this incipient mental alienation to the effect that Abbé Poirel's appointment had produced upon him. She knew nothing of the priest's agreement with Mademoiselle Gamard, for the very excellent reason that he himself had no idea of its scope. And, in accordance with the law of nature that there shall be an admixture of the comic in the most pathetic incidents, Birotteau's strange replies almost made Mademoiselle Salomon smile.

"Chapeloud was right," he said. "He's a monster!"

"Who?" she asked.

"Chapeloud. He's robbed me of everything!"

"Poirel?"

"No, Troubert."

At last they arrived at L'Alouette, where the priest's friends lavished kind attentions upon him so assiduously, that, toward evening, they restored his calmness, and succeeded in obtaining from him a connected narrative of the events of the morning.

The phlegmatic Monsieur de Bourbonne naturally requested to see the document which had seemed to him, since the previous evening, to contain the solution of the riddle. Birotteau produced the fatal stamped paper from his pocket, and handed it to Monsieur de Bourbonne, who ran his eye over it, and soon came to a clause thus conceived:

"As there is a difference of eight hundred francs a year between the amount paid by the late Monsieur Chapeloud and the amount for which said Sophia Gamard agrees to provide said François Birotteau with board and lodging, upon the conditions heretofore set down; and inasmuch as the said François Birotteau further declares that he is unable to pay, for several years ensuing, the price paid by the said Gamard's boarders, and notably by Abbé Troubert; lastly, in consideration of divers sums advanced by said Sophia Gamard, said Birotteau agrees to leave to her, by way of indemnity, all and singular the goods and chattels of which he shall be possessed at his death, or when, for any cause or at any time whatsoever, he shall voluntarily leave the premises herein leased to him, and he agrees to claim no further benefit of the stipulations herein entered into by said Sophia Gamard—"

"*Tudieu!* what a contract!" cried the landowner, "and what a pair of claws the aforesaid Sophie Gamard has provided herself with!"

Poor Birotteau, whose childish brain was unable to conceive any possible reason why he should ever leave Mademoiselle Gamard, expected to die in her house. He had no remembrance of the clause, which was not even discussed when the agreement was drawn, it seemed to him so perfectly fair at a time when he would have signed anything that was put before him, in his overpowering desire to join the old maid's family. His ingenuous conduct seemed so worthy of respect, and Mademoiselle Gamard's conduct so atrocious; there was something so deplorable in the fate of the poor old sexagenarian, and his weakness made him such a touching object, that, in the first flush of her indignation Madame de Listomère cried:

"I induced you to sign the document that has ruined you, and I must restore the happiness I have taken from you."

"But," said the old gentleman, "that paper constitutes a fraud, and there's ground for a suit—"

"Very well, Birotteau shall bring suit. If he loses at Tours, he will win at Orléans. If he loses at Orléans, he will win at Paris," cried Baron de Listomère.

"If he proposes to bring suit," rejoined Monsieur de Bourbonne coolly, "I advise him first of all to resign his vicarage.

"We will consult counsel," said Madame de Listomère, "and we will bring suit if we must. But this whole affair is too disgraceful to Mademoiselle Gamard, and may prove too injurious to Abbé Troubert, for us not to be able to make some compromise."

After mature deliberation, everyone promised Abbé Birotteau his assistance in the struggle that was about to begin between him and all the partisans of his two antagonists. An unerring presentiment, an indefinable provincial instinct, led them all to couple the names of Gamard and Troubert. But not one of all who were then under Madame de Listomère's roof, except the *old rogue*, had a very clear idea of the importance of such a conflict.

Monsieur de Bourbonne led the poor abbé into a corner.

"Of the fourteen persons who are here," he said in an undertone, "it is likely that not one will be on your side a fortnight hence. If you need to call someone to your assistance, you will perhaps find no one but myself with sufficient courage to dare to undertake your defence, because I know the province, men and things, and, better still, where each one's interest lies! But all your friends, although they are running over with good intentions, are starting you on a hard road from which you can't find the way out. Listen to my advice. If you wish to live in peace, resign as vicar of Saint-Gatien, leave Tours. Don't tell anyone where you are going, but seek out some obscure curacy where Troubert cannot fall in with you."

"Leave Tours?" cried the vicar with indescribable dismay.

To him it seemed like death. Was it not to tear up all the roots by which he was connected with the world? Celibates replace sentiments by habits. When to this moral system, as a result of which they may be said to pass through life rather than to live, is added a feeble character, external things assume an astonishing empire over them. Thus Birotteau had become like a plant: to transplant him was to risk his innocent life. Just as a tree, in order to live, must be fed always by the same juices, and have its roots always in the same soil, so Birotteau must always patter about Saint-Gatien, always trot up and down the same path of the Mall, always pass through the streets he had passed through so many years, and continue to frequent the three salons, where he played at whist or backgammon every evening.

"Ah! I didn't think of that," said Monsieur de Bourbonne, looking at the priest with a sort of pity.

Everybody in the city of Tours soon knew that Madame la Baronne de Listomère, widow of a lieutenant-general, had taken Abbé Birotteau, vicar of Saint-Gatien, into her house. This fact, which many people refused to believe, gave a definite shape to the questions at issue and drew the lines sharply between the factions, especially when Mademoiselle Salomon ventured, first of all, to speak of fraud and a lawsuit.

With the subtle vanity and fanatical self-esteem that are the distinguishing characteristics of old maids, Mademoiselle Gamard was deeply wounded by Madame de Listomère's course. The baroness was a woman of high rank and refined manners, whose perfect taste, good breeding and piety could not be gainsaid. By receiving Birotteau in her house she expressed her disapproval of all Mademoiselle Gamard's acts in the most formal way, indirectly censured her conduct, and seemed to give her sanction to the vicar's grievances against his former landlady.

It is necessary, for the better understanding of this narrative, to explain the additional strength that Mademoiselle Gamard derived from the discernment and analytical spirit with which old maids dissect other people's actions, and what the resources of her faction were.

Accompanied by the taciturn Abbé Troubert, she passed her evenings at four or five houses where some ten or twelve persons were accustomed to assemble, all united by similarity of tastes and by their analogous situations. There were one or two old men who espoused the passions and the gossiping tendencies of their maidservants; five or six old maids who passed all their time sifting the words and scrutinizing the acts of their neighbors and of those who stood above or below them on the social ladder; and, lastly, several elderly women, whose sole occupation was retailing ill-natured gossip, keeping an exact account of everybody's wealth, and criticizing the conduct of other people: they foretold marriages and scored the actions of their friends as severely as those of their enemies. These women, who lived in different parts of the city, like the capillary vessels of a plant, inhaled, with the thirst of a leaf for the dew, the tittle-tattle and the secrets of every household, assimilated them and instinctively transmitted them to Abbé Troubert, as leaves communicate to the stalk the moisture they have absorbed. Every evening in the week, these pious souls, inspired by the need of emotion that exists in every mortal, prepared an exact statement of the position of affairs in the city, with a sagacity worthy of the Council of Ten, and, armed with that unerring faculty of espionage which the passions impart, performed the functions of the police. And when they had fathomed the secret cause of any occurrence, their self-esteem led them to appropriate to themselves the collective wisdom of their sanhedrim, and to set the pace for the gossip in their respective spheres. This slothful yet active congregation, invisible yet all-seeing, dumb yet always chattering, possessed an influence which the insignificance of the members seemed to render incapable of harm, but which became formidable nevertheless when it was animated by some subject of unusual interest.

Now it was a long, long while since anything had happened within the narrow circle of their lives that was of such serious importance to every one of them as this battle between Birotteau, supported by Madame de Listomère, and Abbé Troubert and Mademoiselle Gamard. In truth, the three salons of Madame de Listomère, Mademoiselle de la Blottière and Mademoiselle de Villenoix being regarded as hostile camps by those persons with whom Mademoiselle Gamard consorted, there was at the bottom of this conflict a sort of *esprit de corps* with all its vanities. It was the conflict between the Roman people and the Senate in an ant-hill, or a tempest in a glass of water, as Montesquieu said in speaking of the republic of San Marino, where the public offices were often held for but a single day, so easy was it for one tyrant to overthrow another. But this tempest developed none the less as many passions as would have been required to guide the greatest social interests.

Is it not an error to think that time passes swiftly only to those hearts that are seething with vast projects that keep one's life in a turmoil? The hours flew by as swiftly with Abbé Troubert, laden with thought as wearing, tortured by hopes and despair as profound, as the most cruel hours of the ambitious man, the gambler or the lover. God alone is in the secret of the energy we expend upon the triumphs won in secret over men and things and ourselves. If we do not always know where we are going, we know the fatigues of the journey. But, if the historian may be permitted to turn aside a moment from the tale he is telling and assume the rôle of critic, if you are willing to cast a glance at the lives of those old maids and those two abbés, seeking the cause of the disaster that made them rotten at the core, it will perhaps be made clear to you that it is necessary for man to experience certain passions, in order to develop in him the qualities that impart nobleness to his life by broadening its scope, and diminish the selfishness that is natural to all mortals.

Madame de Listomère returned to the city, entirely ignorant of the fact that her friends had been obliged, for five or six days past, to combat a rumor that was generally believed, to the effect that her affection for her nephew was based upon relations that were almost criminal,—a rumor at which she would have laughed had she known of it. She took Abbé Birotteau to her legal adviser, to whom the proposed suit did not seem a simple matter to undertake. The vicar's friends, influenced by confidence in the justice of his cause, or because they were not inclined to hurry in a matter that did not concern themselves personally, postponed the beginning of proceedings until they returned to Tours. Thus Mademoiselle Gamard's friends were able to take the initiative, and they succeeded in representing the affair in a light that cast little credit on Abbé Birotteau. Thereupon the man of the law, whose clientage was made up exclusively of the religious element in the city, astonished Madame de Listomère beyond measure by advising her not to embark upon such a lawsuit; and he brought the consultation to an end by informing her that he would not undertake to carry it on, because, by the terms of the contract, Mademoiselle Gamard was bound to prevail at law; that, in equity,—that is to say, in a court where strict legal rules are somewhat modified,—Abbé Birotteau would appear, in the eyes of the court as of all honorable men, to have failed to display the peaceful, conciliatory, gentlemanly disposition heretofore attributed to him; that Mademoiselle Gamard, who was known to be an amiable woman and easy to live with, had accommodated Birotteau by lending him the money to pay the succession duties under Chapeloud's will, and had not asked him for a receipt; that Abbé Birotteau was too old and shrewd to sign a document without knowing what it contained or realizing its importance; and that, if he had left Mademoiselle Gamard after living with her only two years, when his friend Chapeloud had remained with her twelve years and Troubert fifteen, it could only be in pursuance of some preconceived scheme; that the lawsuit would be looked upon therefore as a rank ingratitude, etc. When Birotteau had gone toward the stairway in advance of the others, the solicitor took Madame de Listomère aside, and urged her, in the name of her peace of mind, not to meddle in the affair.

That evening, the poor vicar, whose mental torment was as great as that of a condemned man in the cells at Bicêtre, awaiting the result of his appeal, could not forbear to tell his friends the result of his visit, as they sat in a circle around Madame de Listomère's hearth, before the hour for making up the card-tables had arrived.

"Except the solicitor for the liberals, I don't know a single pettifogger in all Tours who would undertake to bring the suit except with the intention of losing it," cried Monsieur de Bourbonne, "and I advise you not to touch it."

"If that is true, it's an infamous thing," said the lieutenant. "I'll go myself to that solicitor with the abbé."

"Go after dark then," interposed Monsieur de Bourbonne.

"Why so?"

"I have just heard that Abbé Troubert is appointed vicar-general in the place of him who died the day before yesterday."

"I snap my fingers at Abbé Troubert."

Unfortunately the Baron de Listomère, a man of thirty-six, did not see the sign that Monsieur de Bourbonne made him, to advise him to weigh his words, pointing to a councillor of the prefecture, a friend of Troubert, who was present. The lieutenant continued:

"If Monsieur l'Abbé Troubert is a rascal—"

"Oh! why bring Abbé Troubert into a matter in which he has no concern?" Monsieur de Bourbonne interrupted.

"Why," rejoined the baron, "isn't he getting all the benefit of Abbé Birotteau's furniture? I remember going to call upon Chapeloud once and seeing two valuable pictures there. Do you suppose Monsieur Birotteau intended to give ten thousand francs for two years' board at Mademoiselle Gamard's? the library and furniture are worth almost that amount."

Abbé Birotteau opened his eyes when he learned that he possessed such an enormous capital.

"Parbleu!" continued the baron, hotly pursuing the subject, "Monsieur Salmon, formerly the art expert of the Paris Musée, has come to Tours to see his mother-in-law. I propose to go there this very evening with Abbé Birotteau, to ask him to put a value on the pictures. From there I will take him to the solicitor."

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Two days after this conversation the lawsuit had taken shape. The solicitor of the liberal party, who had been retained by Birotteau, cast much discredit on the vicar's cause. Those persons who were opposed to the existing government, and those who were known for their dislike of priests, or of religion—two things which many people confuse—seized eagerly upon the affair, and the whole city talked about it. The former expert of the Musée had appraised the *Virgin* by Valentin and the *Christ* by Lebrun, two works of great beauty, at eleven thousand francs. As for the gothic bookcase and furniture, the dominant taste for articles of that sort, which was daily increasing at Paris, made them for the moment worth twelve thousand francs. The expert estimated the abbé's belongings, everything included, at thirty thousand francs. Now, as Birotteau could not have intended to give Mademoiselle Gamard that enormous sum in return for the little he might owe her by virtue of the terms of their contract, it was evident that there were good legal grounds for revising it; otherwise the old maid was guilty of wilful fraud. The solicitor instituted proceedings, therefore, by serving a preliminary summons upon Mademoiselle Gamard. This document, although very peremptory in its terms, was supported by citations of authoritative judgments and by several articles of the Code, and was a masterpiece of legal logic, which put the old maid so clearly in the wrong that thirty or forty copies were mischievously distributed through the city by the opposition.

Some days after the opening of hostilities between Birotteau and the old maid, the Baron de Listomère, who hoped to be appointed captain of a corvette in the next batch of promotions, which had been foreshadowed some time since at the Ministry of Marine, received a letter from one of his friends, informing him that there was some talk at the bureau of removing him from the active list. Greatly surprised by this intelligence, he started at once for Paris, and went to the first evening reception of the minister, who seemed equally surprised himself, and began to laugh when he learned of the Baron de Listomère's apprehensions.

The next morning, notwithstanding the minister's words, the baron visited the department. With a lack of discretion not uncommonly exhibited by many chief clerks in their friends' favor, a secretary showed him a document all drawn up, but not yet submitted to the minister on account of the illness of an official, which confirmed the fatal news. The Baron de Listomère went at once to one of his uncles, who, being a deputy, could see the minister immediately at the Chamber, and begged him to sound His Excellency on the subject, as his future career was at stake. In his uncle's carriage he awaited the close of the session, a prey to the keenest anxiety. The deputy came out some time before the session closed, and said to his nephew, as they drove back to his house:

"What the devil are you making war on priests for? The minister began by informing me that you had put yourself at the head of the liberals at Tours! 'His opinions are detestable, he doesn't follow the course laid down by the government,' etc. His sentences were as involved as if he were still addressing the Chamber. Then I said: 'Come, come! tell us what the trouble is!' His Excellency at last admitted that you didn't stand well with the Grand Almoner's office. In short, after seeking further information from some of my colleagues, I have found out that you have been speaking lightly of a certain Abbé Troubert, who is only a vicar-general to be sure, but the most important personage in the province, where he represents the Congregation. I answered for you, body and soul, to the minister. My dear nephew, if you want to make your way in the world, don't stir up any priestly hostility. Go to Tours at once and make your peace with that devil of a vicar-general. Understand that vicars-general are a class of people with whom you must always live in peace. *Morbleu!* when we are all working to re-establish the religion, it's a stupid thing for a lieutenant in the navy, who wants to be a captain, to show disrespect to the priests. If you don't come to terms with Abbé Troubert, don't count on me any more: I'll deny you. The Minister for Ecclesiastical Affairs spoke to me of that man just now as likely to be a bishop some day. If Troubert should take a dislike to our family, he might prevent our inclusion in the approaching creation of peers. Do you see?"

This harangue revealed to the lieutenant the secret manœuvres of Troubert, of whom Birotteau was wont foolishly to say: "I don't know what he finds to do all night."

The canon's position in the centre of the female senate that did police duty so thoroughly in the province, and his personal capacity had brought about his selection by the Congregation, from among all the ecclesiastics in the city, to be the unseen pro-consul of Touraine. Archbishop, commanding general, prefect, great and small alike, were subject to his occult sway. The Baron de Listomère was not long in choosing his course.

"I don't propose," he said to his uncle, "to receive a second ecclesiastical broadside *below my water-line.*"

Three days after this diplomatic conference between the uncle and the nephew, the sailor, having returned unexpectedly to Tours by the mail-coach, disclosed to his aunt, on the very evening of his arrival, the perils that threatened the dearest hopes of the Listomère family, if he and she persisted in giving their support to *that idiot of a Birotteau.* The baron had detained Monsieur de Bourbonne as the old gentleman was taking his hat and cane after the game of whist was at an end. The *old rogue's* keen intelligence was indispensable, to throw light upon the reefs by which the Listomères were encompassed, and the *old rogue* had taken up his cane prematurely only to make make them whisper in his ear:

"Stay a moment; we have something to say to you."

The baron's speedy return, his air of satisfaction, which did not harmonize with the serious expression assumed by his features from time to time, had led Monsieur de Bourbonne to suspect, in a vague sort of way, that the lieutenant had met with some obstacles in his crusade against Gamard and Troubert. He manifested no surprise when the baron dilated upon the secret power of the vicar-general and agent of the Congregation.

"I knew it," he said.

"Then why didn't you tell us?" cried the baroness.

"Madame," he replied quickly, "forget that I divined the secret of that priest's unacknowledged influence, and I will forget that you knew it as well as I. If we did not hold our peace, we should be looked upon as his accomplices; we should be feared and hated. Follow my example; pretend to be deceived; but be very sure where you are putting your feet. I said enough to you, but you didn't understand me, and I did not choose to compromise myself."

"What course are we to pursue now?" the baron asked.

The abandonment of Birotteau was not even discussed, but it was assumed by the three to be necessarily the first step.

"To retreat with the honors of war has always been considered the greatest achievement of the greatest generals," was Monsieur de Bourbonne's reply. "Bend the knee to Troubert; if his hate is weaker than his vanity, you will make an ally of him; but, if you bend too far, he will trample on you; for Boileau says:

"'Ruin everything rather, that is the spirit of the Church.'

"Make him believe that you intend to leave the service and you'll escape him, Monsieur le Baron.—Turn away the vicar, madame, and you will enable La Gamard to win the case. Ask Abbé Troubert, at the archbishop's, if he knows whist, and he will say *yes.* Ask him to come and take a hand in this salon, where he has always wanted to be admitted; he will certainly come. You are a woman; find a way to enlist the priest in your interest. When the baron commands a man-of-war, when his uncle is a peer of France and Troubert a bishop, you can make Birotteau a canon at your pleasure. Until then, bend; but bend gracefully and with a threatening expression. Your family can give Troubert as much support as he will give you; you will easily come to terms.—Go ahead slowly, lead in hand, sailor!"

"Poor Birotteau!" said the baroness.

"You must attack him at once," rejoined Monsieur de Bourbonne, taking his departure. "If some adroit liberal should take possession of that empty head, he would cause you a deal of annoyance. After all, the courts would surely give judgment in his favor, and Troubert is probably afraid of that result. He may forgive you for having begun the fight; but, after a defeat, he would be implacable. I have said my say."

He closed his snuff-box with a snap, put on his overshoes and left the house.

The next morning, after breakfast, the baroness was left alone with the vicar, and said to him, not without evident embarrassment:

"My dear Monsieur Birotteau, you will think my request very unjust and very inconsistent; but for your own sake and ours, you must, first of all, put an end to this lawsuit by abandoning your claims, and you must also leave my house."

The poor priest turned pale at these words.

"I am the innocent cause of your misfortunes," she said, "and I know that, except for my nephew, you would not have begun the lawsuit which is now making us all unhappy. But listen!"

She laid before him succinctly the wide-spreading ramifications of the affair, and explained the serious nature of its results. Her reflections during the night had led her to form an accurate idea of Troubert's past life, and she was able therefore, without going wide of the mark, to show Birotteau the net in which that subtle scheme of revenge had enveloped him, and to disclose to him the extraordinary talent and power of his enemy by unmasking his hatred, by suggesting its causes, by describing him as crouching at Chapeloud's feet for twelve years, devouring Chapeloud, and persecuting Chapeloud, after his death, in the person of his friend. The innocent Birotteau clasped his hands as if in prayer and wept in anguish at the aspect of human horrors which his pure soul had never suspected. As terrified as if he were standing on the brink of an abyss, he listened, with tearful, staring, expressionless eyes, to the words of his benefactress, who said in conclusion:

"I know what a base thing it is to abandon you, but, my dear abbé, duties to one's family take precedence over the duties of friendship. Bow before the storm as I do; I will prove to you how grateful I am. I say nothing to you of your personal interests, I simply undertake to see that they do not suffer. You will have no occasion for anxiety about yourself. With the assistance of Bourbonne, who will know how to save appearances, I will see to it that you want nothing. My friend, give me the right to be false to you. I will remain your friend and at the same time conform to the maxims of worldly prudence. Decide."

The poor, bewildered abbé cried:

"Chapeloud was right when he said that if Troubert could pull him out of his grave by the feet, he would do it! He sleeps in Chapeloud's bed."

"This is not the time to complain," said Madame de Listomère; "we have very little time in which to act. Come!"

Birotteau was too soft-hearted not to obey, at important crises, the unreflecting impulse of the first moment. Moreover, his life at best was only one long agony. He said, with a despairing glance at his patroness, which tore her heart:

"I put myself in your hands. I am no more than a *bourrier* in the street."

That Tourainian word has no other possible equivalent than a wisp of straw. But there are pretty little wisps of straw, yellow and smooth and shining, which delight the hearts of children; while the *bourrier* is the faded, mud-stained wisp, trodden in the gutters, tossed about by the wind, crushed beneath the feet of the passer-by.

"But, madame, I should not want to leave Chapeloud's portrait with Abbé Troubert; it was painted for me and it belongs to me; induce them to give that back to me and I will give up all the rest."

"Very well," said Madame de Listomère, "I will call upon Mademoiselle Gamard."

These words were uttered in a tone expressive of the extraordinary effort the Baronne de Listomère would be required to make in order to lower herself so far as to flatter the old maid's pride.

"I will try to arrange everything," she added. "I hardly dare to hope, however. Go and see Monsieur de Bourbonne, and let him draw up your abandonment of the suit in proper form; then bring me the document duly executed; with the archbishop's assistance, we may be able to end the matter here."

Birotteau left the room, utterly overwhelmed. In his eyes Troubert had assumed the dimensions of an Egyptian pyramid. His hands were in Paris and his elbows in the Cloister Saint-Gatien.

"To think that *he* could prevent the Marquis de Listomère from becoming a peer of France!—*With the archbishop's assistance we may be able to end the matter here!*"

In presence of such momentous interests, Birotteau felt that he was a mere worm: he did himself justice.

The news of Birotteau's second removal was the more astonishing as its cause was beyond comprehension. Madame de Listomère said that, as her nephew proposed to leave the service and marry, she needed the apartment occupied by the vicar to add to his. No one knew as yet of Birotteau's abandonment of his suit. Monsieur de Bourbonne's instructions were judiciously carried out. These two items of news, coming to the ears of the vicar-general, must have flattered his self-esteem, for they told him that the Listomère family, even if it did not surrender, proposed to remain at all events neutral, and tacitly recognized the occult power of the Congregation: was not that equivalent to submitting to it? But the lawsuit still remained *sub judice;* that is to say, the complainant yielded and threatened at the same time.

Thus the Listomères had assumed an attitude exactly similar to that of the vicar-general; they stood aloof and were in a position to guide the course of events. But at this juncture an event of grave importance came to pass and rendered the success of the plans devised by Monsieur de Bourbonne and the Listomères to appease the Gamard-Troubert faction more problematical than ever. The night before, Mademoiselle Gamard had caught a cold on leaving the cathedral, had taken to her bed and was supposed to be dangerously ill. The whole city resounded with lamentations inspired by false commiseration. "Mademoiselle Gamard's sensitive nature could not endure the scandal of this litigation. Although she acted strictly within her right, she would surely die of vexation. Birotteau had killed his benefactress—" Such was the substance of the phrases scattered broadcast by the capillary tubes of the great female conclave, and obligingly repeated by the city of Tours.

Madame de Listomère had the mortification of having called upon the old maid without reaping the fruit of her visit. She asked very politely if she might speak with the vicar-general. Flattered perhaps at the thought of receiving, in Chapeloud's library, and in front of the fireplace above which hung the two hotly contested pictures, a woman by whom he had been slighted, Troubert kept the baroness waiting a moment; then he consented to grant her an audience. Never did courtier or diplomatist bring to the discussion of his private affairs or to the conduct of an important negotiation, more adroitness, more dissimulation, more profound calculation than the baroness and the abbé displayed when they stood face to face.

Like the sponsor who assisted the champion to don his armor in the Middle Ages, and encouraged his valor by wise counsel as he was entering the lists, the *old rogue* had said to the baroness:

"Don't forget the part you have to play; you are a mediator and not an interested party. Troubert is also a mediator. Weigh your words! study the inflections of the vicar-general's voice. If he strokes his chin, you will have caught him."

Artists sometimes amuse themselves by representing in a caricature the contrast that frequently exists between *what people say* and *what they think*. At this point, in order thoroughly to grasp the interest of the duel of words that took place between the priest and the great lady, it is essential to reveal the thoughts that they mutually concealed beneath phrases apparently of little significance. Madame de Listomère began by expressing the sorrow that Birotteau's lawsuit caused her, and went on to speak of her desire to see the affair brought to an end to the satisfaction of both parties.

"The harm is done, madame," said the abbé in a grave voice, "the virtuous Mademoiselle Gamard is dying.—*I care no more for that foolish old maid than I do for Father Jean,*" he thought; "*but I would like right well to saddle her death on your shoulders and* *worry your conscience with it, if you are idiot enough to care.*"

"Upon learning of her illness, monsieur," replied the baroness, "I required Monsieur le Vicaire to abandon his suit, and I came to bring a document to that effect to the saintly creature.—*I see your game, you cunning rascal!*" she thought; "*but we are out of reach of your slanders. As for you, if you take the paper, you will burn your fingers, you will admit your complicity.*"

There was a moment's pause.

"Mademoiselle Gamard's temporal affairs do not concern me," said the priest at last, lowering his heavy eyelids over his eagle eyes, to conceal his emotions.—"*Oh no! you can't compromise me! But, God be praised! those damned lawyers won't have a chance to try a case that might smirch me. What do the Listomères want, that they come fawning on me in this way?*"

"Monsieur," the baroness replied, "Monsieur Birotteau's affairs are of as little concern to me as Mademoiselle Gamard's to you; but, unfortunately, the religion may suffer from their disputes, and I see in you only a mediator in a case in which my own rôle is that and nothing more.—*We shall not deceive each other, Monsieur Troubert,*" she thought. "*Do you appreciate the epigrammatic turn of that reply?*"

"The religion suffer, madame?" said the vicar-general. "The religion occupies too lofty a position for men to be able to assail it.—*I am the religion,*" he thought.—"God will judge us unerringly, madame," he added; "I recognize no tribunal but His."

"Very well, monsieur," she replied; "let us try to make men's judgments accord with God's judgments.—*Oh! yes, you are the religion.*"

Abbé Troubert changed his tone.

"Has not monsieur your nephew been in Paris?—*You found out something about me there*," he thought, "*I can crush you, who once despised me. You must surrender.*"

"Yes, monsieur; I thank you for the interest you take in him. He returns to Paris this evening; he has been written for by the minister who is very kind to us, and is anxious that he should not leave the service.—"*You shall not crush us, Jesuit,*" she thought; "*I understand your jest.*"

A moment's pause.

"I cannot approve his conduct in this matter, but we must forgive a sailor for not having a profound knowledge of the law.—*Let us come to terms,*" she thought. "*We shall gain nothing by fighting.*"

A faint smile was lost in the folds of the abbé's face.

"He has done us the service of letting us know the value of those two paintings," he said, glancing up at them; "they will add greatly to the beauty of the Chapel of the Virgin.—*You hurled an epigram at me, there are two for you; now we are quits, madame.*"

"If you give them to Saint-Gatien, I will beg you to allow me to present the church with frames worthy of the place and the paintings.—*I would like* *to make you admit that you coveted Birotteau's belongings,*" she thought.

"They do not belong to me," said the priest, still on his guard.

"But here," said Madame de Listomère, "is a document that puts an end to all discussion, and gives them definitively to Mademoiselle Gamard."—She placed the paper on the table.—"*See how much confidence I have in you, monsieur,*" she thought. —"It is worthy of you, monsieur," she added, "worthy of your exemplary character, to reconcile two Christians; although I take but little interest in Monsieur Birotteau now—"

"But he is your boarder," he interrupted.

"No, monsieur, he is no longer at my house.—*My brother-in-law's peerage and my nephew's promotion make me do many cowardly things,*" she thought.

The abbé remained impassive, but his calm attitude was indicative of the most violent emotions. Monsieur de Bourbonne alone had divined the secret of this apparent tranquillity. The priest triumphed!

"Why did you undertake to deliver his withdrawal of the suit?" he asked, impelled by a feeling analogous to that which leads a woman to make people repeat complimentary remarks.

"I couldn't resist a compassionate impulse. Birotteau, whose weak character must be well known to you, implored me to see Mademoiselle Gamard, in order to obtain, as the price of his renunciation of—"

The abbé frowned.

"Of *rights* acknowledged by eminent lawyers, the portrait—"

The abbé looked at Madame de Listomère.

"The portrait of Chapeloud," she continued. "I leave you to judge his claim.—*You would be beaten if the cause came to trial,*" she thought.

The tone in which the baroness uttered the words *eminent lawyers* showed the priest that she knew the enemy's strong and weak points. Madame de Listomère displayed so much talent in the course of this conversation, which continued a long while in this strain, that that connoisseur *emeritus,* the abbé, went down to Mademoiselle Gamard to lay the proposed compromise before her.

He soon returned.

"These are the poor dying woman's words, madame," he said: 'Monsieur l'Abbé Chapeloud was too good a friend to me for me to part with his portrait.' For my own part," he continued, "if it belonged to me, I would not give it up to anyone. My feelings for the dear departed were too warm and enduring for me not to assume the right to dispute possession of his image with the whole world."

"Monsieur, let us not quarrel over a wretched picture.—*I care as little about it as you do yourself,*" she thought.—"Keep it, and we will have a copy made. I congratulate myself on having given that unfortunate and deplorable lawsuit its quietus, and I have the additional pleasure of having made your acquaintance. I have heard a great deal of your skill at whist. You will forgive a woman for being a little curious," she added with a smile. "If you would come and play sometimes at my house, you cannot doubt the welcome you would receive."—Troubert rubbed his chin.—"*He is caught! Bourbonne was right,*" she thought, "*he has his share of vanity.*"

In truth, the vicar-general experienced at that moment the delightful sensation against which Mirabeau was unable to defend himself when he saw the *porte-cochère* of a house that had once been closed to him open to admit his carriage.

"Madame," he replied, "my time is too fully occupied to allow me to go into society. But what would one not do for you?—*The old maid is bound to die, I will try the Listomères and will help them if they help me,*" he thought. "*It is better to have them for friends than for enemies.*"

Madame de Listomère returned home, hoping that the archbishop would consummate a pacific undertaking so happily begun. But Birotteau was not destined to profit by his withdrawal of the suit. On the following day Madame de Listomère learned of Mademoiselle Gamard's death. When the old maid's will was opened, no one was surprised to find that she had made Abbé Troubert her residuary legatee. Her property was estimated at a hundred thousand crowns. The vicar-general sent to Madame de Listomère two notes of invitation to the funeral services and burial of his friend: one was for her, the other for her nephew.

"We must go," said she.

"That is just what it means!" cried Monsieur de

Bourbonne. "It is a test by which Abbé Troubert proposes to judge you.—Baron, you must go to the cemetery," he added, turning to the lieutenant, who, unluckily for himself, had not left Tours.

The obsequies took place and were celebrated with true ecclesiastical magnificence. A single person wept. It was Birotteau, who, sitting alone, and out of sight in a secluded corner, blamed himself for her death, and prayed with sincere fervor for her soul, deploring bitterly his failure to obtain her forgiveness for the wrong he had done her. Abbé Troubert attended his friend's body to the grave in which it was to be buried. When the procession reached the brink of the grave, he pronounced a discourse wherein, thanks to his talent, the picture of the narrow, circumscribed life led by the deceased assumed monumental proportions. Those who heard him noticed particularly these words in his peroration:

> "This life, full of years devoted to God and religion, this life embellished by so many good deeds done in silence, so many modest and unsuspected virtues, was shattered by a sorrow which we should call undeserved, if, standing on the brink of eternity, we could forget that all our afflictions are sent by God. The numerous friends of this saint-like creature, knowing the nobility and innocence of her soul, foresaw that she could endure everything save suspicions that would ruin her entire life. And so it may well be that Providence took her hence to God's bosom to remove her from the trials to which we are exposed. Happy they who can rest, here below, at peace with themselves, as Sophie now rests in the abode of the blessed, in her robe of innocence!"

"When he had finished this pompous oration," continued Monsieur de Bourbonne, who was describing the scene at the burial to Madame de Listomère and the baron, when the cards were laid aside for the evening and the other guests had taken their leave, "imagine, if you can, this Louis XI. in a cassock, giving the last shake to the holy-water sprinkler like this."

Monsieur de Bourbonne took the tongs and imitated Abbé Troubert's gesture so exactly that the baron and his aunt could not restrain a smile.

"Not till then," continued the old gentleman, "did he betray himself. His demeanor throughout had been perfect, but it was impossible for him, no doubt, to refrain from giving vent, by a gesture, to his joy at the thought that he was putting the old maid away forever; for he held her in sovereign contempt and hated her probably as cordially as he detested Chapeloud."

The next morning, Mademoiselle Salomon came to breakfast with Madame de Listomère, and said to her the moment she arrived:

"Our poor Abbé Birotteau received a frightful blow just now, and one which shows the most cold-blooded scheming of hatred. He is appointed Curé of Saint-Symphorien."

Saint-Symphorien is a suburb of Tours, situated on the other side of the bridge. This bridge, one of the most beautiful specimens of French architecture, is nineteen hundred feet long, and the squares at each end are exactly alike.

"Do you understand?" she resumed after a pause, amazed at Madame de Listomère's indifference upon learning of that calamity. "He will be, to all intent, a hundred leagues from Tours, from his friends, from everything. Don't you see that the banishment—for it is banishment—is the more horrible, because he is removed from a city which his eyes will see every day, but which he can hardly ever visit? The poor man, since misfortune came upon him, can hardly walk, and he will have to walk a league to see us. At this moment he is in bed with an attack of fever. The vicarage at Saint-Symphorien is cold and damp, and the parish is not rich enough to repair it. So the poor old man will practically be buried in a veritable tomb. What an infernal plot!"

To bring this narrative to a close, we need do no more perhaps than record a few events and draw one last picture.

Five months later, the vicar-general was made a bishop. Madame de Listomère died and bequeathed fifteen hundred francs a year to Birotteau. On the day on which the contents of the baroness's will were made known, Monseigneur Hyacinthe, Bishop of Troyes, was on the point of leaving the city of Tours, to take up his residence in his diocese; but he postponed his departure. Furious at having been fooled by a woman, to whom he had given his hand while she was secretly extending hers to a man whom he regarded as his enemy, Troubert threatened anew the baron's career and the Marquis de

Listomère's peerage. He uttered publicly, in the archbishop's salon, one of those ecclesiastical sentences which are heavy with vengeance and running over with honeyed sweetness. The ambitious naval officer called upon the implacable priest, who undoubtedly exacted harsh conditions from him; for the baron's conduct bore witness to his absolute submission to the wishes of the terrible agent of the Congregation.

The new bishop conveyed Mademoiselle Gamard's house to the Chapter of the Cathedral by properly authenticated deed, he gave the bookcase and books to the little seminary, and the two pictures to the Chapel of the Virgin; but he kept Chapeloud's portrait. No one was able to explain this almost total relinquishment of Mademoiselle Gamard's inheritance. Monsieur de Bourbonne imagined that the bishop secretly retained the available portion, in order to be in a position to maintain his rank with honor in Paris, if he should be elevated to the bench of bishops in the Upper Chamber. But, on the eve of Monseigneur Troubert's departure, the *old rogue* finally fathomed the last bit of scheming that lay behind that action,—a parting blow administered by the most persistent of all revengeful passions to the weakest of all victims. Madame de Listomère's legacy to Birotteau was attacked by the Baron de Listomère on the ground of undue influence! A few days after the service of the preliminary summons, the baron received his commission as captain. As a disciplinary measure, the curé of Saint-Symphorien was forbidden to exercise his priestly functions. His ecclesiastical superiors tried the cause in advance. The assassin of the late Sophie Gamard was a knave!

If Monseigneur Troubert had retained the old maid's property it would have been difficult to bring about this censure of Birotteau.

As Monseigneur Hyacinthe, Bishop of Troyes, drove along Quai Saint-Symphorien in a post-chaise, *en route* for Paris, poor Abbé Birotteau was sitting in an armchair in the sunlight on the edge of a terrace. The poor priest, smitten by his archbishop, was pale and thin. Bitter sorrow, imprinted on every feature, had entirely changed that face, formerly so mild and cheerful. Over his eyes, once innocently brightened by the pleasures of good cheer and undimmed by anxious thought, illness cast a veil that simulated reflection. It was but the skeleton of the Birotteau, who, a year before, trotted through the Cloister, so well-content in his nonentity. The bishop bestowed upon his victim a glance of contempt and pity; then he consented to forget him, and passed on.

In other days, Troubert would unquestionably have been a Hildebrand or an Alexander VI. To-day the Church has ceased to be a political power, and it no longer absorbs the strength of solitary people. Celibacy therefore has this capital defect, that it concentrates man's qualities upon a single passion, selfishness, and thereby renders celibates either harmful or useless. We live in an age wherein it is the common failing of all forms of government that they have moulded man for society rather than society for man. There is a constant conflict between the individual and the system which seeks to exploit him, and which he seeks to turn to his own advantage; whereas formerly man, really more free than now, displayed more unselfishness in public affairs. The circle in which men move has insensibly broadened: the mind that can embrace its full extent will always be a magnificent exception; for, as a general rule, in morals as in physics, movement loses in intensity what it gains in extent. Society should not rest upon exceptions as a basis. In the beginning, man was the father pure and simple, and his heart beat warmly, concentrated in the limited circle of the family. Later he lived for a tribe or a small republic: hence the great historic instances of devotion in Greece and Rome. Then he was the partisan of a caste or a religion, and in the interest of its grandeur rose often to sublime heights; but there the field of his interest was increased by the addition of the vast territory of the intellect. To-day his life is bound up in that of an immense fatherland; ere long his family will be the whole world, so it is said. But would not such moral cosmopolitism, the hope of Christianized Rome, be a sublime error? It is so natural to believe in the realization of a noble chimera, in the universal brotherhood of man! But alas! the human machine has not such divine proportions. Minds that are sufficiently expansive to espouse a sentimentality reserved for great men alone, will never belong to simple citizens or fathers of families. Some physiologists claim that, when the brain expands thus, the heart should contract. Not so! The apparent selfishness of men who carry a science, a nation or a code of laws in their bosom, is the noblest of passions, is it not, and in some sort, the maternity of the masses? To give birth to new peoples or to produce new ideas, should they not unite in their powerful brains the breasts of woman and the might of God? The history of Innocent III., of Peter the Great and of all other leaders of their epochs would prove, if need be, in a most exalted sphere, the vast and far-reaching idea that Troubert represented in the solitude of the Cloister Saint-Gatien.

Saint-Firmin, April, 1832.

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